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# *The knight's ransom*

Laura Valentine



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THE  
KNIGHT'S RANSOM.









Front.

*Sir Gerald repulsed by the Lady Cicely.*

p. 313





THE  
KNIGHT'S RANSOM.

BY L. VALENTINE,  
EDITOR OF THE 'HOME BOOK.'

'Seest thou yon grey gleaming hall,  
Where the deep elm shadows fall?  
Voices that have left the earth  
Long ago,  
Still are murmuring from its hearth  
Soft and low.'

Mrs. HEMANS.

With Original Illustrations.



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## PUBLISHER'S PREFACE.



This tale was originally published under the title of 'The Ransom.' Some years having elapsed since it appeared, and many inquiries having been made for it in a popular form, it has been thoroughly revised, much of it re-written ; and it is hoped that its appearance in 'Warne's Household Novels' will meet with the approbation of the reading community.





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# THE KNIGHT'S RANSOM.

## CHAPTER I.

### AN OLD ENGLISH HOME.

**T**HE old English manor, resting in calm antiquity beneath the shadows of its ancestral oaks, possesses a charm to which few are insensible. Its quiet dignity and homely comfort, its neighbourly union with the poor dwellings that cluster round it, its stillness and repose, the caw of its rookery, and the solemn shades of its surrounding woodlands, form a spell by which the giddy present is united to the solemn past, and something of its repose comes to soothe and still the 'vexed pulse' of this overtasked, over-busy age.

Many of these homes of our forefathers possess, in their modest archives, traditions well worth preserving: stories of man's daring and woman's devotion, which would make a domestic history of England as noble and inspiring as our national record is. One of these stray leaves we purpose now to gather up and tell its story, that maidens of the nineteenth

century may see of what deeds the women of England were then capable.

In the thirtieth year of the reign of King Henry III. might be seen, where Leighton Manor now stands, a castellated and strongly defended dwelling; of no great age, for it had been erected since the jealous restrictions placed upon the erection of castles or domestic fortresses had led to the embattled and moated house as their substitute. Leighton Manor was a quadrangular building, with gables and a single tower at one of the angles. A moat surrounded it; but it was not otherwise fortified. Here dwelt a country knight, by name Grimbald Pouncefort. He was of Norman descent, though the lands he held had become his by his marriage with a Saxon heiress. His family consisted of two sons and of an adopted daughter, the orphan of a dear brother-at-arms of Sir Grimbald, who, dying in poverty, to which he had been reduced in the evil days of the tyrant John, committed his portionless babe to the care of his brother soldier. The trust was frankly undertaken and faithfully fulfilled.

'She shall be to me as a daughter and hereafter wed my heir,' was the prompt assurance that had robbed death of its terrors for the father. The look of the dying man, full of confidence and gratitude, which repaid his promise, never was effaced from Sir Grimbald's memory.

Constance de Lingard was a fair, meek child, timid and silent; for indistinct images of suffering that had passed before her infant gaze haunted her young imagination, and all the love and care of her adopted parents, and the joyous companionship of their boys, failed to remove the dark shade of sorrow which had obscured her infancy. She shrank from the boisterous playfulness of the heir, who was her destined betrothed, and sought

rather the society of his younger and gentler brother, who, being intended for the military priesthood of the Temple, received clerky training from the confessor, Father Dennis, in his own home, till he should be old enough to be sent to one of the preceptories of the Order.

The elder son, Edward, was only an occasional visitor to his family, being, according to the fashions of the age, first a page and next a squire in the family of a great noble—that of the Baron Fitzwalter—where he served the apprenticeship of chivalry.

Gerald, the younger brother, having no other companion, made little Constance a sharer both in his pastimes and his studies. He had become her tutor in sport; and her rapid progress so interested the learned Franciscan who taught the boy, that he vouchsafed a share of his instructions to the young girl also, and gave her an education rarely bestowed on her sex in that age. Sharing their beloved studies and their sylvan sports together, the young pair grew up together, as happy as the birds and butterflies of their native woodlands, till the time came for that first parting, which is, perhaps, saddest of all for the girlhood of a family—when they who have dwelt beneath the same roof, and shared all the joys and transient griefs of childhood, are separated for the first time—when the sister sees the brother of her love go forth to dwell amongst strangers, to return henceforth only as a passing guest from the chill atmosphere of that world out of which none ever came unchanged.

Gerald departed to enter on his noviciate at the Preceptory of the Temple in London. He grieved at bidding farewell to his gentle pupil, whom he loved with the affection of a brother; but his grief did not equal hers. He was going to embrace a

high and a holy destiny—to join the band of champions who were the defence and boast of Christendom, and imagination and enthusiasm conspired to throw a halo over the future, the radiance of which lighted the darkened present. In scenes of novelty, in the companionship of the young men amongst whom he soon found himself, Gerald had little time to think of the old Manor, of its merry greenwood, of the gentle mother, and the fair girl who had for years been the sharer of his thoughts. Yet he loved them truly, and was of a kind and gentle nature ; but as a swift stream bears on its ever-flowing waters no trace of that which has crossed its bosom, so in the rapid succession of passing events—in the current of the world—the images of the past are insensibly effaced from the mind, and man, its denizen, is not, like woman, the slave of memory.

For Constance the every-day events of life, the studies she loved, the change of seasons, were all full of memories of her absent companion, who thus became the engrossing interest of the secluded little maiden's mind. But years were stealing on, and Constance was soon to be roused from her day-dreams.

On a summer evening of the year 1246, two young knights, attended by their esquires bearing their casques and shields, and by some five or six men-at-arms, turned from the great London road into the thick wood which separated it from the village of Leighton. The elder of the two was a young man of a most striking and commanding presence. He was upwards of six feet in height, but so admirably was his figure proportioned, that he looked much shorter than he really was. His velvet hood was thrown far back, and his rich dark curls (which, when lifted by the light air, betrayed the use of an exquisite perfume) fell on his shoulders. His mantle was richly embroi-

dered, and by its gay colour confirmed what the admirably wrought hauberk it covered hinted, that the gallant was a courtyer and something of a coxcomb. The younger horseman was shorter and stouter than his comrade, fresh coloured, and betraying, by his auburn hair and quick blue eye, a Saxon affinity. If his features were inferior to the tall knight's—who was indeed greatly gifted by Nature—they were far more pleasing to a physiognomist, being animated by an expression of frank good humour and honesty, which instantly gained him the confidence of the beholder.

'You have a fair inheritance, Edward,' said the tall knight, as they entered the wood. 'I would willingly exchange with you, and resign the distinguished honour (as he deems it) of being nephew to the powerful Baron Fitzwalter, to possess it.'

Sir Edward Pauncefort cast a glance of gratified pride on the scene before them as he answered,

'Nay, envy not a poor country knight, doomed to pass his inglorious days, in these times of peace, in hunting, hawking, eating, sleeping, and exercising justice on rustics as stupid as their own flocks and herds; whilst your fate is cast in a Court, where your occupations will be tilting and running at the ring, singing Provençal *chansons*, and wooing the fair dames who contend for the notice of the spoiled child of fortune.'

'Ay, but of these delights I am weary, Sir Knight of the Woods and Fields! The sweet fresh breezes of the country are worth all the perfumes of the south, and the smile of a gentle maiden unversed in the arts of our Court dames is to be preferred to all the practised glances and studied graces of the fair frequenters of tournaments and revels.'

'A new whim,' said Pauncefort, smiling, 'and not likely to be of any duration. How long would the ambitious Fitzwalter,

the fastidious, refined knight, the unrivalled squire of dames, be content to dwell an exile from the world in which he has hitherto delighted?’

‘Till winter should have stripped these magnificent trees, and clothed the greensward in snow, perhaps,’ was the laughing reply; ‘and till my rural damsel’s fingers and pretty nose should be redder than might be deemed becoming or attractive. Such a scene as this, nevertheless, may excuse a man for taking to the greenwood, and give a charm to the honourable profession of thief and deer-stealer, Edward.’

They were nearly in the middle of the wood now, and its picturesque beauty well merited the admiration the knight expressed. The road was bordered on each side by stately oaks, which extended their leafy arms over the pathway; and by light trembling aspens and beeches of unusual size and beauty, the branches of which lay, heavy with their glittering and luxuriant foliage, upon the earth which they had robbed of its grassy covering. And all around, and between the trees, sparkled the silver star of Bethlehem, mingling its white blossoms with the graceful bluebell and many other wild flowers.

The bright hues of sunset threw a glory over the forest trees, and, as the knights rode onwards, they yielded to the influences of the hour and scene, and were silent, listening to the murmur of the wood-pigeon, the distant cawing of the rooks, and the hum of the summer insects—the only sounds, except the tramp of their own and their attendants’ steeds, that broke the hush of departing day. The road at length grew wider, and a thin spiral line of smoke ascending from amongst the trees announced the ending of the wood and the entrance to Leighton village. The first dwelling that met the eye of the traveller, on issuing from it, was a yeoman’s home-

stead and farm ; a thriving-looking possession, with byres and barns, fields and cattle, attesting the prosperity and industry of the owner. The house door was open, a spinning-wheel stood just within, and on the roots of an immense oak, which grew almost close to the threshold, lay a quantity of rushes and a half-finished basket, delicately wrought.

‘This is the dwelling of our trusty yeoman, Giles Perrot,’ observed the heir of Leighton, reining in his horse ; ‘do you remember him, Fitzwalter?’

‘To be sure I do. He was my instructor in the art of angling when I was last at Leighton. Many an hour, when he could afford the time, did we spend beside the Ouzel together. I marvel at my extraordinary patience in those days! What has become of his son, your foster-brother, who was our willing assistant in all our mad pranks?’

‘Dead ; and the youngest and only surviving son is an idiot. But I must give my good foster-mother a passing greeting, or she will never forgive me.’ And he called loudly on the name of Maud Perrot. A slight bustle was heard within, a rustic damsel looked from an open window, and, uttering an exclamation of surprise and joy, as instantly withdrew her head, and ran to summon her mistress. In a few moments a girl of about nineteen or twenty years of age came out, and with low obeisance, glad smiles, and shy blushes, welcomed her lord’s son to his home. Her mother, she said, ‘was gone to the Hall with Giles, to carry a basket of his own making to the lady, full of their fairest flowers ; for it was Lady Constance’s birthday, and the poor boy’—her eyes glistened as she named him—‘had been thinking day and night for weeks of the little offering he wished to make her : she was so good and kind to him. Her mother would be vexed that she was not at home when Sir



Edward did them the honour of calling at their house ; but would he please to take any refreshment there ?'

'We shall sup at the Manor, I thank you, pretty Alinor,' said Pauncefort, kindly. 'Commend me to your good father ; perhaps I shall see Maud at the Hall. Alinor has outgrown your recollection, Edmund, has she not ?'

'She has in truth,' replied Fitzwalter ; 'but though I might forget the little damsel of other days, I shall not fail to remember the fairest forest flower I have ever gazed on.'

The girl coloured deeply, and her eyes bashfully sought the ground, as the knight fixed his bold gaze on her face.

'Go to thy household duty, Alinor,' said Pauncefort, 'and heed not the flattering words of knights and courtiers, which mean nothing.' Nodding kindly to her, he rode on, accompanied by Fitzwalter, whose backward gaze discerned the pretty villager still on the same spot, looking after them, though the moment she saw herself observed she withdrew into the farm.

Edmund Fitzwalter had a keen perception and strong taste for the beautiful, which had been fully gratified in his brief progress through his friend's inheritance, for the rare loveliness of the yeoman's daughter was worthy of the scene of sylvan beauty in which he had beheld her. The form of rounded symmetry, the eyes and hair of the colour of the hazel nut, the dark but glowing complexion, and dazzling teeth of the rustic beauty, were all by turns the subject of the warm encomiums he uttered to his somewhat absent companion as they proceeded. Edward scarcely heard, and did not heed him, for those sweet and sacred emotions which fill the heart on approaching the place of one's birth after a long absence were awakened by his near approach to the home of his fathers. And now they had entered the village, and serf and freeman, young and old, came forth to

hail with their glad shouts of welcome the heir of Leighton, the son of him who ruled them more as a father than a feudal lord. Sir Edward had kind words of greeting and remembrance for all ; his followers had their share in the welcome ; and, escorted by a large party of retainers, the travellers passed the park gates, and reached the drawbridge of the ancient Hall, where the parents waited to embrace their first-born.



## CHAPTER II.

### CONSTANCE DE LINGARD.

'Tis pity love should be so contrary.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE Norman possessors of Leighton had, as we have said, replaced the low rambling dwelling of their Saxon predecessors with a tall, castellated manor-house, which had been enlarged and improved by the present knight ; he had also employed the skill and taste of the carvers in wood and stone, whose genius was at that time fostered by royal patronage, for the adornment of the noble hall in which he and his wife now waited to receive their son and his guest.

The sun's rays were still sufficiently powerful to force their way through the narrow arched windows above the great door-

way, and their crimson hue rested on the elaborate carving, or flickered on the polished armour and sylvan trophies which decorated the walls, giving a faint glow also to the somewhat pale cheeks of the Lady Pauncefort. Her husband stood near her, eagerly talking to a grave and venerable-looking priest immediately behind her seat.

Sir Grimbald Pauncefort was a tall, powerful man, between fifty and sixty years of age, comely rather than handsome, with the same open, benevolent expression of countenance observable in his son, and possessing a certain frank bluntness of manner, which indicated a long absence from the Court, in which the refinement of foreign manners was already greatly softening the habits and bearing of the English chivalry.

'It is mere folly and perverseness of Constance to refuse to come down and welcome Edward here,' he said, impatiently, after a moment's pause. 'What can make her indisposed, as her damsel says she is? She was well enough this morning. It is nought but foolish caprice, and you do not wisely in permitting it, lady.'

'Nay, but you forget, Sir Grimbald,' was the calm reply, 'that Constance learned of her betrothal to Edward only to-day. Such intelligence may well agitate one so gentle and so sensitive.'

'Learned it for the first time to-day!' exclaimed the knight. 'Did she not come beneath my roof as his affianced bride?'

'Ay, but she knew it not. She was too young to have understood or remembered what she then heard. Trust me, Edward will prize her the more for her timid modesty.'

'Methinks he would better have liked her to give him a frank welcome; but be it as thou wilt, my Edith: I presume not to be so good a judge of maidenly decorum as thou art.'

The blast of a horn and the lowering of the drawbridge interrupted their further discourse, and the knight stepped eagerly forward as the great doors were thrown open, and young Pauncefort and his knightly comrade were ushered into the hall. The lady rose from her seat, and passed hastily down the apartment, and whilst she gave a mother's welcome to her first-born son, the father turned from him to proffer a warm greeting to their guest.

'It rejoices me, young sir,' he said, as he released his visitor's hand from his cordial grasp,—'it rejoices me to behold the kinsman of my good Lord Fitzwalter once more beneath my roof. But you have outgrown all recollection. You were no higher than my lady's page yonder when first we welcomed you to Leighton, and now you have at least two inches the advantage of myself in height. Should you have recognized Sir Edmund Fitzwalter, had you met him elsewhere, Edith?'

'Methinks I should have had some recollection of his features,' said the lady, smiling: 'he has the lip and eye of a Fitzwalter; but time has been as prodigal of its favours to him as it has been unkind to ourselves, Grimbald.'

'Say not so, I pray you, lady,' answered Fitzwalter, eagerly; 'time hath cast no shadow on your fair face since it won my childish admiration by its sweet, kind smile. I should have recognized you immediately.'

'You flatter bravely, Edmund,' said the Knight of Leighton, with one of his joyous laughs; 'if you lavish such honied compliments on our country ladies, you will win all their hearts: and we have a bevy of fair dames coming to-morrow, with their lords, sires, and other kinsmen, to try the hospitality of Leighton. But let us to a more private chamber till these knaves, who stand gazing and grinning a welcome to you both, get us some

supper. You must be weary of your long fast, if you have had no food since dinner.'

As the knight ushered his guest to the inner apartment, making many courteous inquiries as to the well-being of his uncle the Baron, and of his own old friends of former years who were residing in London or about the Court, the lady lingered behind them, and, taking her son's hand, gazed long and fondly in his face.

'How much you are grown, my Edward,' she said, 'and how sun-burned you are! You are more like your father when I first remember him than you ever were. And you are come now to dwell altogether with us, my son?'

'For a time, dear mother,' he replied, with a smile of answering affection; 'for a long time, I may say in truth, since King Henry has no need of our almost useless swords. But where tarries Constance? Why is she not here to greet me?'

'She is not well.—Nay, do not look alarmed, Edward; it is a mere trifling indisposition.'

'Mother,' said the young heir, 'tell me, I beseech you, does Constance know she is destined to be my wife? Is she willing to listen to my suit?'

'She learned your father's will this morning, and it has agitated her a little; you know how timid she has ever been.'

'Does it grieve her?' exclaimed Pauncefort, impetuously. 'Does she dread me—hate me?'

'Hate you, Edward!' replied the lady, looking proudly in his face; 'who *could* hate you? And why should you suspect our gentle Constance of such an unchristian feeling? No; believe me, she is perfectly happy in her dutiful obedience to our will.'

'Thank Heaven for it!' ejaculated the young man, earnestly.

‘I should have been miserable had it been otherwise. When shall I see her?’

‘At supper. Now let us join your guest, or he may deem us lacking in courtesy.’

‘The heart knoweth its own bitterness,’ saith Divine Wisdom, ‘and a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy;’ a deep secret are its most cherished thoughts and feelings, even to the dwellers beneath the same roof, to the daily, hourly companions of our life. Even womanly sympathy and penetration cannot always perceive the many hidden springs of joy or sorrow that dwell in its depths. The Lady Edith had naturally misinterpreted the emotion of her adopted daughter, when Constance, with tears, requested to be allowed a few hours of solitary reflection after learning her guardian’s will, and, misled by her own secret wishes and her maternal love, she unintentionally deceived her son. For, in her lonely turret chamber, Constance de Lingard listened to the distant shouts that hailed the arrival of the heir of Leighton with anguish; and when the sound of the descending drawbridge announced that he was admitted within the home of his fathers, and that a short interval of time must bring him to her presence, she sank before the crucifix in earnest prayer,—prayer for strength under her appointed trial,—prayer that the sin of her heart might be forgiven her; for a deep sin it was in the pure eyes of the Catholic Constance that she had dared to love a destined servant of the altar—that, unwooded, she had bestowed her heart where such a gift was sacrilege. Bitter were the feelings of the affianced bride during that brief time of supplication and suffering. No trial of her after life ever equalled that sorrow. But she had sought strength where it is ever to be found; and when the summons to the evening meal obliged her to leave her chamber

and join the guests, she had regained her usual calm gentleness of demeanour, and entered the hall with an expression of so angelic a character in her fair face, and a humility so touching and unconscious in her manner, that Edward Pauncefort, struck by the new and inexplicable charm, wondered that he had not before perceived the perfection of her loveliness; and the Knight of Baynard's Castle secretly acknowledged that the young lady of Leighton had no equal, in her own peculiar style of beauty, in the fair train of the Queen of England. Constance spoke little during supper, though she listened with pleased attention to Fitzwalter's news of the Court and of the city, and received his studied compliments and graceful flatteries with quiet courtesy. He had begun to think that nothing could animate the lovely statue, when a sudden remark from the old knight brought a deep glow to her pale cheeks and a sudden light to her soft blue eyes.

'Thou hast never yet asked after thy playfellow of former years, Constance,' he said, 'and Edward has seen Gerald lately.'

'He is well, I hope?' asked the maiden, timidly, and without raising her eyes to her betrothed's face as she spoke.

'Quite well; and commended him to your kind remembrance, sweet Constance. He met with an untoward accident, though, some time past. His horse threw him near the Franciscan monastery in Newgate Street, and, but for the care of one of the holy brotherhood, the Temple had lost a lance. Nay, look not so alarmed, dear lady; he is quite recovered.'

'And is devoted to the society of his leech,' added Fitzwalter, with a scornful smile, 'who is the pupil and friend of the renowned Franciscan—half monk, half sorcerer—residing at Oxford. I hope they will not make your old companion a dealer, like themselves, in the black art, lady.'

Constance smiled ; but the Lady Pauncefort exclaimed,

‘The saints forbid ! Gerald was ever too fond of strange wild studies, and it is an awful thing to aspire to more knowledge than has been vouchsafed to us. Dost hear our guest’s tidings, Father Dennis?’

‘Be not alarmed, my daughter,’ said the priest, calmly ; ‘Friar John, of London, is a right holy and learned son of the Church, and will rather benefit my dear pupil by his admonitions than harm him by counselling unholy studies. I heard from your son whilst under the good father’s care, lady ; but I deemed it useless to alarm you with the tidings of a past danger.’

‘The priest is of your order, holy father,’ said Fitzwalter, ‘and, it may be, your friend ; but you cannot deny that both he and his friend Friar Roger of Oxford, prosecute studies beyond the usual routine of the schools, and scarcely befitting their sacred calling. They tell wild stories in the good city of Oxford of the magic art of Friar Roger Bacon.’

‘Mere inventions of the ignorant populace,’ answered the priest : ‘he is a wonderful and profound scholar, and his acquirements, and even his virtues, create him enemies ; for who, Sir Knight, can surpass his fellows in this evil world, and not incur the malignity of envy?’

‘The good father is right,’ said the old Knight of Leighton. ‘I know it full well ; for never yet did I win prize at tilt or tourney without finding my friends look the cooler on me for it. And, in truth, I too love my friend the better when I feel he is but my equal, or, it may be, my inferior.’

‘A frank confession,’ said the friar, smiling, ‘and true to our fallen and evil nature.’

‘We will hope,’ said the host, ‘that our Gerald will be safe from the snares of the Evil One under the banner of Beauséant.’



Sir Edmund, let us drink to the gallant Order of the Temple. It is long since I have had a merry evening, for Father Dennis is a sworn foe to the wine-cup, and the visits of my old friend, Sir Hubert of Highbury, have become rare and unfrequent since he hath had a home of his own to feast in. But to-morrow we trust to see the old Hall well filled with merry revellers. Nay, Edward, you shall not leave us. You may bestow all your newest flatteries and winning courtesies to-morrow on your fair lady; but to-night you must practise the part of a joyous host, and drain a wine-cup or two with your old father and his honoured guest.'



### CHAPTER III.

#### A FALSE FRIEND.

Friendship is constant in all other things,  
Save in the office and affairs of love.

SHAKSPEARE.

IT would be a tedious task to relate the incidents of the week following the return of Edward Pauncefort to the Manor. The guests who assembled at it in the course of a few days were distinguished by no characteristics more striking or interesting than those usually found in country neighbours of the present day. There were amongst them keen sportsmen, who preferred a good dog or horse to all other earthly blessings

—young knights, who were as ambitious of the distinction of being well dressed, and finding favour in the eyes of fair ladies, as any exquisite of the nineteenth century—and a few men of a higher and better order; to all of whom, however, the ceremonious courtesy of the day gave the same general resemblance of manner that their armour did of appearance. The hospitality of Leighton was profuse, the revelry unceasing; and, whilst the knights pursued their hunting or hawking, the ladies beguiled their lonely hours by comparing patterns of tapestry, and discussing shades of wool, fashions, and characters, much as their fair descendants of the nineteenth century are wont to do.

Constance de Lingard, as adopted daughter of the house, was called on constantly to amuse the indolence, or to listen to the loquacity, of the lady visitors, and, above all, to hide from the shrewdness of feminine penetration that she was unhappy, absent, and dispirited. It was indeed oftentimes a trial of patience to listen to the twice-told tale of the ancient dames' conquests over the hearts of knights, "braver and more courteous than were to be found in the degenerate days in which Constance's youth was cast," or to the idle scandal and important nothings of her younger and light-hearted companions. And, then, evening brought Edward to her side, to pierce her heart by his frank and confiding tenderness, void of all suspicion of her truth. But there was an inward strength which supported the tired spirit through the weary day, and none suspected that the pillow of the fair creature who had so much added to their daily pleasure or comfort was steeped in bitter and burning tears. And yet, during those hours of pleasure and careless enjoyment to many, were sown the germs of misery and guilt for one—of untimely and violent death for

another. On the eager, susceptible, and unprincipled Fitzwalter, the "bright innocence" of the betrothed's life, the unvarying sweetness of her manner, the still more captivating charm of her modestly-concealed superiority over the fair triflers around her, had produced their natural effect. He loved her; as sincerely as a selfish nature can love; the more ardently, perhaps, because it appeared an impossibility to win her—the affianced of his friend—the bride whose nuptials were but delayed till the Baron Fitzwalter could leave his London fortress to be present at their celebration. And yet Edmund was not without hope. The quick-sightedness of his new-born passion had assured him that his friend's love was only permitted, not returned. He never dreamed of Constance's heart having been given to the intended priest-soldier of the Temple—he would as soon have thought of a rival in old Father Dennis; and as she mixed now for the first time in society, and distinguished him frequently from the assembled chivalry, what wonder was it that the vanity of the handsome courtier led him to indulge in hopes of winning the affections of one so full of sensibility and of enthusiasm? The traitor aimed artfully at the fulfilment of his hopes. He was unceasingly near Constance when Edward was not present. He anticipated her wishes, assisted her efforts to please her adopted father's guests, entertained her by his ever-varying conversation, or sang to her the love-lays of Provence with the eloquence of real passion. But as he always resigned his place beside her when Edward approached them, and as a treason against his early friend would have appeared an impossible crime to the high-minded maiden, she ascribed all his attentions to his friendship for her betrothed, and repaid them with a warm-hearted gratitude which aided the delusions of his vanity.

Affairs were thus proceeding at the Hall, when a letter from the lord of Baynard's Castle announced the impossibility of his visiting Leighton till the autumn, and with many courteous regrets and apologies, entreated the knight not to delay the ceremony of his son's marriage on his account, but to offer to the fair bride his excuses and a small casket containing a necklace of pearls of great value. The old knight was disappointed. The Baron was the patron of his eldest son—the old and tried friend of his house—and he had even entertained a hope that Royalty itself—in the person of Richard Earl of Cornwall, the King's brother—might have accompanied the noble Standard-bearer of the City of London to Leighton. All were disappointed: Edward, that he could not enjoy the triumph of displaying his beautiful bride to the young knights who would have accompanied his patron; Constance, that no indefinite delay any longer intervened before the accomplishment of her fate; the gay party of visitors, that their pleasure was not to be crowned by the splendour of the great Baron's train, and the fresh revelry that must have attended his reception.

Some two or three evenings after the day which had brought this disappointment to Leighton, two peasants were slowly proceeding through the wood, towards the farm already mentioned in the commencement of our tale. The elder of the twain was the beautiful daughter of Giles Perrot, the yeoman; the other a boy some years younger, and greatly resembling her in feature, although the want of expression in his face took much from the likeness. He had the same coloured eyes and hair, the same dark but glowing complexion; but his eyes wandered wildly or were fixed vacantly, and his feeble and weak mouth, never closed, revealed the sad fact that intellect was altogether wanting—that the handsome lad was an afflicted imbecile. He did not

walk in a straight line beside his sister, but continually crossed her path, sometimes to gather a flower, or watch a creeping insect, more frequently from mere restlessness and uncertainty of purpose. His companion paid but little heed to him, moving on absorbed in thought, apparently of a pleasing nature, for a smile lingered on her rosy mouth, and her dark eyes were full of sparkling light, as she raised them occasionally to the clear blue sky.

The boy was the first to break a silence which had been of some duration.

'Why art thou so silent, Alinor?' he said fretfully; 'thou hast not spoken to poor Giles since we met the knight. Art thou thinking of what he said to thee?'

'Nay, I scarce marked his idle words, Giles,' replied the damsel, with a silvery laugh; 'what said he, brother?'

'Thou must needs be deaf as well as dumb, then, Ally, for he ever says the same thing! He said thy cheeks were like the dark roses of Damascus, and thy eyes like stars—the bright golden stars! Ally, dear, do you think the knight told you the truth?'

'Foolish one, no! he did but use the fine words that are common in the Court, and only meant that he thought me fair to look on.'

'Do they not speak the truth at Court, Ally? Giles always does. Good Father Dennis and fair Mistress Constance tell him, the truth pleases God. I should not like to learn the words of the Court, if they be false.'

'Poor Giles! thou dost not comprehend me now, and canst not; and in good truth the knight talked foolishly,'—the look of conscious and gratified vanity contradicted her expressed opinion—'but knights and nobles put such a grace in their

idlest flatteries! I would I had been born a noble dame, rather than a country maiden!’

‘A foolish wish, pretty Alinor,’ said a clear deep voice behind her; ‘they who are of high estate have many a care and sorrow unknown to the humble yeomanry.’

‘What, John Miller! art thou here, and playing the eaves-dropper also? It is a pity I knew it not, or thou shouldst have heard enough to cure thee of such a dishonest practice,’ said the girl, laughingly turning towards a young man who had issued from a side path, and stood—unperceived before—at her side.

‘In good faith, Ally,’ was the reply, ‘I was not an intentional listener; I heard your wish before I had time to speak to you, and grieved was I to learn that the knight—be he who he may—who has spoken words of praise and courtesy to you, hath taught you to repine at your lot. Is this the cause that you have scorned me so of late, Alinor?’

‘I scorn you not,’ said the damsel; ‘but I will not deceive you, John: I do not love you well enough to wed you, and should not, were you even a Thane.’

‘Alas!’ said the yeoman, sorrowfully; ‘I know not how to flatter and woo you with honied words; but if a true heart be of worth, you do not well to reject me, Alinor; nevertheless, I will not utterly despair, but wait as patiently as I love truly, and time and my patience may yet stand me in good stead.’

‘Do not think I shall ever change my mind, John,’ replied the girl, quickly. ‘I shall always have a neighbourly feeling for you, but nothing more; and I pray you, do not speak of your suit to my father.’

‘I will obey you in all things, Alinor; yet, dearest maiden, forgive me if I speak frankly to you once more. These courtly

gallants, who have a smooth smile and flattering speech for every fair face, whether it smile beneath a coif or a wimple, are evil company for a village maiden. It were better surely, Alinor, to keep more at home, and avoid meeting them so often.'

'And who told you, Master Miller, that I meet them often?' inquired the maiden angrily, and colouring deeply; 'have you been playing the spy upon me?'

'No, in truth, but the tattlers of the village have informed me that pretty Alinor Perrot walks oftener than usual in the greenwood, and that one of the knights from Leighton is frequently beside her.'

'And you believe the stories of evil-minded gossips!' she exclaimed indignantly; 'but let them talk as they list! I will walk where it best pleases me, and talk with whom I like, in very despite of them.'

'Be not angry, Alinor,' said her companion, soothingly; 'I do but warn you as a friend and neighbour to beware of such reports, and still more of these false and idle loiterers at Leighton. Thank the saints, we shall now soon be rid of their company!'

The girl started, and looked up eagerly.

'What mean you, John,' she said; 'hath my Lord Fitzwalter arrived?'

'No, damsel, but the wedding and his visit are alike deferred, and the guests leave the Manor to-morrow, to return in the autumn, when the lord of Baynard's Castle will also be present.'

'To-morrow!' said Alinor, faintly; 'do they all leave to-morrow?'

'All, except the Knight of Baynard's Castle, Sir Edmund

Fitzwalter, and he tarries another day, and then accompanies Sir Grimbald and his son to London.'

'To London, sayest thou, John Miller? Sir Grimbald and Sir Edward also? Wherefore is the wedding put off?'

'I know not for a certainty. I met Hubert, the falconer, just now in the wood, and he told me that it was decided, since the lord of Baynard's Castle could not come till the autumn, that the Lady Constance's bridal with my young lord should not take place till then, and that my good lord Sir Grimbald, and Sir Edward also, should proceed forthwith to London to witness the profession of your foster-brother, young Master Gerald, who takes the vows of a Knight Templar on the eve of Lammas day.'

'That is news indeed,' said the maiden. 'Methought the Lady Constance was to have been married in a week's time, without waiting for the Baron's presence. I marvel that Sir Edward leaves his betrothed so soon again!'

'Hubert says he assented to his father's wish reluctantly enough, but Sir Edmund Fitzwalter, who is all-powerful with the old knight, persuaded him to defer the bridal, and to accompany him to London.'

'It is very strange,' murmured Alinor, half unconsciously.

'Passing strange, indeed,' said her companion. 'Methinks Sir Edmund must have dealings with the Evil One; he ever maketh others work his will, his followers tell me.'

'But why should *he* wish the marriage to be delayed?' she asked.

The yeoman smiled.

'They report at the Hall that Sir Edmund would fain prevent it altogether; that he loves the fair Lady Constance better than befits Sir Edward's sworn brother-at-arms.'



'It is false! he loves her not!' exclaimed Alinor, with a vehemence which startled the miller; then she added in some confusion, 'it must needs be a false report; and likely to make much mischief, John, if repeated, for I am as sure as that you stand here beside me, no knight could be so black a traitor to the friend of his early childhood. They have ever some idle story at the Hall; it would better befit them to attend to their duties as servingmen, than to be watching their masters. How should *they* know that Sir Edmund loves our young lady?'

'But, Alinor, having eyes and ears, servants must see and hear, and generally they are not far wrong in their judgments. I do not mean, however, to defend them for repeating matters that a faithful follower should keep secret; but Hubert knew he might trust me with his own opinion. And you, I am sure, would not betray him.'

'Trust me, no, John, not even to my father. And I pray you name it not to my mother, lest she repeat it to her village gossips, and the report breed strife between Sir Edward and his friend.—It moved my anger,' she added, as if in explanation of her former eager denial, 'to hear a noble gentleman belied, perchance by the same people who have busied themselves so idly about myself.'

Her companion made no answer, being probably unable to contradict her suspicion that his information of her rambles in the wood had been obtained from Hubert the falconer. The voice of Giles Perrot the elder, speaking to a labourer outside the farm, was distinctly audible; and Alinor, pausing, said after a moment's hesitation,

'Thou wilt not vex my father by repeating the gossips' foolish tales about me, John? He is, thou knowest, hasty of mood, and it would sorely anger him against both them and me.'

‘Will you promise me, then, to remain within doors till these strangers be gone, and thus give no cause for tattling tongues to move against you, Alinor?’

The girl coloured deeply, and struggling between anger and the fear of her father’s displeasure, hesitated, withdrawing impatiently from his grasp the hand the miller had taken.

‘Thou hast no right to dictate to me,’ she said at length; ‘nevertheless, since nought else can charm thy babbling tongue—be it so. I will sit within and spin, at thy bidding, rather than see my father grieved.’

And hurrying forward, she joined Giles; while John of the Mill, as he beheld the proud smile with which the yeoman regarded his beautiful child, felt that it would have been impossible for him to have wounded honest Perrot’s heart by a hint of rumours to her disadvantage, even had he not promised silence.

The news from the Hall, which the miller had gleaned from his friend Hubert, were correct. By means of that strange influence which some individuals possess over the minds of their fellow-men, Edmund Fitzwalter had persuaded both the elder knight and the affianced bridegroom to postpone the wedding at Leighton till the autumn, and Constance was free for a brief period longer. It was with feelings of deep exultation in his successful schemes that the traitor joined the Lady Pauncefort, her adopted daughter, and some of the fair guests, in the park, on his return from a long ride in the forest, that same evening.

The little party were laughing and chatting beneath a huge oak, with some knights and the jester. Constance sat somewhat apart from the others, and Fitzwalter thought she looked paler than usual—even sad. He had been present when Sir Grimbald had communicated his altered intentions to her, and

had read the feeling of relief and gladness which had been expressed by her varying features. To what, then, could he ascribe her present pensive abstraction? Did she regret *his* intended departure? The wildest hopes flitted through his mind as he approached, and in a voice modulated and softened to more than its usual sweetness—addressed her.

‘I am a true penitent, Lady Constance,’ he said, in a very low tone; ‘will you absolve me?’

‘For what offence?’ she asked, rousing herself from the thoughts which engrossed her, and smiling on her affianced husband’s friend; ‘wherefore are you penitent, Sir Edmund?’

‘For having cast a shadow on your brow, lady.’

‘What mean you, Sir Knight? I cannot easily solve riddles.’

‘I will read it to you, then, but not here;—may I pray, of your courtesy, gentle Constance,’ he added with earnestness, ‘a private hearing touching matters of much importance?’

Constance looked astonished and a little uneasy for a moment, but the feeling passed as rapidly as did the momentary suspicion of his meaning, and she replied,

‘If you have anything to confide to me relating to Sir Edward, or to your uncle the Baron, I will hear it as we return homewards, Sir Edmund.’ Then rising, she joined the party beneath the oak, and listened with her quiet smile to the playful dialogue one of the young knights was keeping up with the quick-witted and privileged jester. Fitzwalter’s fiery spirit chafed with impatience as he waited till the idlers should move towards the Manor, and Constance would have shuddered had she encountered the angry scowl with which he regarded her, as any chance remarks of hers, or amused expression of countenance, renewed the merry war of words and gay laughter

of the listeners. At length the deepening twilight aided his wishes, and the Lady Pauncefort rose to return to the Manor. In fulfilment of her promise, Constance disengaged herself from her companions, and lingered some paces behind them: Edmund was instantly at her side. She raised her soft blue eyes, and looked inquiringly in his face: that look of perfect unconsciousness of his feelings for a moment disconcerted Fitzwalter. He struggled with his embarrassment, and involuntarily looking away from her, he murmured,

‘Sweet Lady Constance, I fear my officious zeal, by inducing Sir Grimbald to delay your union with Edward, has pained, and perhaps offended you.’

‘Oh, no! believe me,’ she answered, eagerly; ‘I sincerely thank you for it!—We all love our liberty, Sir Edmund,’ she added, blushing at her own impetuous and unguarded frankness, ‘and I am indebted to you for some weeks of additional freedom before I utter my vows of obedience to a lord and master. I am glad you induced Edward to pay my good lord, the Baron Fitzwalter, the respect of waiting for his presence. It was a mark of reverence he owed to the patron and guardian of his youth; yet I think he would have yielded it only at your entreaty.’

‘You rejoice at the delay, Constance? Would that I could restore you entirely to freedom of choice,’ he added fervently; ‘for—nay, look not so startled and so angry, lady—you do not love Edward Pauncefort!’

The paleness of her momentary dismay was almost instantly succeeded by a deep blush of anger, and, with a haughtiness he had never thought it possible she could assume, Constance paused, and turned towards him.

‘What mean you by this insolence, Sir Knight?’ she said;

'do your senses wander, that you dare utter such a suspicion to your friend's affianced bride? Nothing I have done or said can justify or excuse such boldness!'

'Call it madness, if you will,' he exclaimed, suddenly taking her hand and forcibly detaining her—'folly or insolence, lady; but hear me for the first, it may be the last time. Maidenly dissimulation cannot blind one guided, as I am, by the light of a true affection. You cannot even look a falsehood, Constance, and I have read in your gentle eyes, submission—resignation to your fate—but no love for your affianced. Forgive me,' he added, abruptly interrupting himself, for, pale and abashed, the maiden leaned for support against a tree. 'Forgive my madness—my presumption—my daring love.'

Constance was unable to reply, but she silently and scornfully rejected his proffered support.

'Leave me, Sir Edmund!' she said at length, with difficulty, in answer to his reiterated entreaties for pardon; 'leave me. Your insolent suspicions, your wild declaration, are both insulting to me and dishonourable to yourself. Traitor to your confiding friend! how could you hope to win me—even if I did not love him—by so deep a perfidy? Leave me, Sir Knight, and let me try to forget that one so base and false exists.'

'Constance,' he exclaimed, in a tone of repressed anguish, 'Constance, have you no pity for the erring—no compassion for misplaced and hopeless, but true and deep affection? Forgive me, I implore you.'

The young lady was deeply agitated.

'It becomes not erring mortals to refuse forgiveness,' she said, in a low tone. 'I pardon you, Sir Edmund; let me believe, for the future, that this strange scene has been a

momentary delirium, from which your better reason would revolt. It shall be for ever obliterated from my memory, nor will I be the first to teach my noble betrothed, of how little worth are the friendships of the world !

‘And will you not give me your pity?’ he asked.

‘Seek rather my esteem, by subduing your wild and vain fancy,’ she answered gravely. ‘And now I command you to leave me, and to follow our companions. I would not excite idle curiosity, by allowing our guests to see how much our brief conference has moved me.’

She waved him from her with an air of dignity that demanded and won a prompt obedience. Then turning, she pursued a longer and more retired path towards the Hall, and Edmund saw her no more that evening.

The morrow brought the bustle of departure ; and the hospitable observances of the age, in speeding the parting guest, engrossed the attention of the Knight of Leighton and his family, and prevented their remarking the changed manner of Constance to their most favoured and esteemed visitor. But it did not pass unmarked by Fitzwalter himself, and it deeply mortified him. He could better have borne the anger he had at first met, than the calm and somewhat scornful coldness of Constance’s manner. It was the first time he had failed in a purpose, and, with the selfish waywardness of his character, he resolved that he would not now be defeated in his resolution to win the affianced bride of his friend, although his vanity could no longer delude him into the belief that she loved him. He avoided her society for the short remainder of his stay at the Manor, but the change was not remarked ; the entire devotion of the young Edward to his betrothed during the rest of the time withdrawing her from all other companionship.

Edmund exchanged only the words of ordinary courtesy with her, till the last morning of his visit, when, as the old knight and Edward were bidding adieu to the Lady Edith, he found himself for a moment beside Constance.

'Will you not give me your good wishes and a friendly farewell, gentle lady?' he asked, in a low voice.

'Farewell, Sir Knight,' she answered, in the same tone. 'May you speedily forget all of Leighton that it would pain you to remember.'

'Impossible!' he answered.

'Nothing is impossible to a firm and resolute spirit,' was her reply; and those words long after haunted the mind of Fitzwalter, though with a very different signification to that intended by the speaker.



## CHAPTER IV.

### A DISAPPEARANCE.

It is too true an evil; gone she is;  
And what's to come of my despised time,  
Is nought but bitterness.

SHAKSPEARE.

**L**EIGHTON Manor was again left to its usual peaceful monotony. The deer slumbered undisturbed in the sunny glades of the greenwood, and the song of the birds or

the axe of the woodman alone broke its silence. The bridal guests had departed, and the ladies of the Hall were left, with the confessor only, in their quiet home.

The third day after the departure of the travellers, Constance de Lingard, attended by a damsel bearing a small basket of delicacies, proceeded into the hamlet to visit some sick and aged peasants, whose wants had been supplied by her attendant during the time that the attention of the young lady had been called to other and less pleasing duties. Her return from this errand of charity brought Constance and her attendant near the Beech Farm, and desiring the latter to wait for her beneath the trees, the lady walked to the homestead, to inquire after the family of Gerald's foster-mother. To her surprise, the door was closed ; no sounds of bustling industry and cheerful toil were audible, and the dwelling wore an air of desolation and stillness that alarmed her. She knocked hastily, and, after a moment's delay, the door was opened by the yeoman himself. Constance started as she returned his respectful salutation, so sad, and even stern, was the expression of his usually blithe, open countenance ; nor did the rapid glance she threw round the large low apartment, into which he ushered her, diminish her alarm. Maud Perrot, his wife, was seated on a low stool near the middle of the room, her face buried in her apron, rocking herself backwards and forwards in the extremity of grief, whilst close beside her crouched the idiot boy, gazing up in her face with a look of sorrowful wonder.

The entrance of the lady failed to rouse the sufferer, who appeared unconscious of her presence ; and when she turned to ask the reason of the strange scene before her, she was shocked at the deep anguish which convulsed Perrot's features.



'Where is your daughter? Where is Alinor? What means this grief, good yeoman?' she asked eagerly, almost fearing to hear his answer, for Gerald's foster-sister had a strong hold on the affections of his early companion.

'I have no daughter, lady!' was the answer, in a tone so harsh and unnatural, that his hearer shuddered as he spoke. 'She, who was my pride, hath brought my grey hairs to shame and sorrow; she has fled from her home, and left our age desolate.'

'Fled? 'T is surely impossible! So good and dutiful a maiden! Are you certain that you do not blame her wrongfully? With whom can she have fled?'

'We know not, lady, but gone she is, and earth hath nothing now offer to our afflicted age; for the child left us hath not the gift of reason.'

'When did you lose her?' asked Lady Constance, in deep emotion.

'Some three days since, lady. She was sent by my wife to visit her aunt, a sick and aged widow dwelling on the other side of the Ouzel; and as she returned not at night we believed that her kinswoman was worse, and that she had tarried with her till the morning; but it chanced that John o' the Mill (who hath long wooed her) called here yester-eve, and told us, that Ally had left her aunt's house the evening of the same day she went to see her, in time to return home before curfew, as he learned from our kinswoman herself.'

'But she may have been murdered by robbers—some evil may have chanced to her,' exclaimed Constance; 'her disappearance does not prove that she has fled from you.'

'I would I could think so, lady; for rather would I believe that my child slept in an untimely grave, than that she had

brought shame on my lowly but honest name ! But I cannot hope it. John Miller and Hubert the falconer have both seen her several times in deep converse with a stranger knight, and the simple one yonder, who was ever her companion, and who always speaks the truth, tells us that the gallant flattered my unhappy girl for her fair face ; but poor Giles knows not the name of the traitor knight, nor can he remember more than snatches of what he heard.'

'Have you made any efforts for finding her?' asked the lady.

'We have sought her everywhere in vain, madam,' replied the yeoman. 'Our noble master's absence has prevented my appealing to him for aid ; but with to-morrow's dawn I intend to follow him to London. He may perchance aid me in the recovery of my daughter, for the gallant of the forest was doubtless one of the late visitors at the Manor.'

'Did not Hubert recognize the knight?' asked Constance.

'He did not, lady, having had only a passing glimpse of him, walking beside my unhappy child.'

'Tis strange and sad,' said the lady; 'and yet I cannot think my poor Alinor is to blame. I will believe her innocent till I learn more fully the circumstances of her disappearance.'

'Bless you, bless you for those words, my sweet young lady!' exclaimed the mother, rising and throwing herself passionately at the feet of Constance. 'I thank you in my poor child's name—my innocent, unhappy child ! She would not wed John Miller, and in his anger he has slandered her ; do not doubt it, dear lady.'

'Now shame upon thee, Maud !' interrupted her husband, sternly ; 'wouldst thou belie an honest man ? Doth not John

Miller sorrow as bitterly for our lost one as we do ourselves? And did he not seek to hide the evil from us till he had made all possible search for her? Did not even the silly crone, whom in thy folly thou didst consult, tell thee that thy child had left the yeoman's cottage for the knight's castle?'

'And thou dost believe her, Giles? Ay, thou wilt believe evil of thine own poor child even from the lips of a witch.'

'Of whom speak you, Maud?' asked Constance, gently.

'Under your patience, Lady Constance,' replied the yeoman, answering for her, 'my wife and a gossip of hers have been this morning to ask tidings of old Mab, the weird woman of Charliewood, touching our child, and the crone gave her the answer I have just repeated, mocking her bitterly for her former pride in Alinor's beauty.'

'Do you think the woman has any certain knowledge, or does she speak merely according to her pretended skill in divination?'

'She has certain knowledge, I believe, lady, for our neighbour, who accompanied my wife, asserts that Mab was about to name the knight, but suddenly checked herself, and afterwards no persuasions could induce her to reveal his name.'

'It may be all a spiteful falsehood of the evil-natured old woman to torture you both,' said the lady; 'nevertheless, I will myself see her, and endeavour to discover what she really knows. I think she fears Sir Grimbold, and I shall threaten her with his wrath if she refuse to answer me. Be of better cheer, Maud,' she added, kindly taking the woman's hand; 'I hope to bring you, at least, the cold comfort of certainty. My attendant damsel waits without, and our good Giles shall give us the protection of his company to the dale: we shall have time to go and return before curfew.'

‘The blessing of Heaven on your kind head, dear lady! sobbed the bereaved mother. ‘I will weep and pray till your return.’

The lady stayed not to listen to her thanks, nor to the briefly uttered gratitude of the yeoman, but hurried forth, and communicated her purpose to her attendant; whilst Giles Perrot seized his quarter-staff—for the road to the witch’s hut was lonely and wild—and prepared to follow the fearless and benevolent Constance and her somewhat affrighted damsel to the dale of Charliewood. At any other time the yeoman’s courage would have proved unequal to the trial of encountering the dreaded witch of the dale, with no other companions than two young and timid maidens; but his paternal affection overcame even his superstitious terrors, and he walked boldly beside his young mistress in sad and respectful silence. No human dwelling skirted the narrow sheep-path they entered on leaving the village: on one side a grove of tall pines reared their straight slender trunks, through which the evening breezes sighed mournfully; on the other, a wide common, sprinkled with patches of furze, extended to the horizon. Across it their walk led for about half a mile, and they then found themselves in the immediate vicinity of a wretched mud hut, the door of which was open. A suppressed exclamation of alarm from her attendant then stopped Constance’s progress forward, and, raising her eyes, she beheld its cause through the open door of the miserable dwelling. The hag was not alone. A tall, powerful, ruffianly-looking man was seated at a rude table covered with ale, cold meat, and bread, from which he was making a hasty meal, whilst the old woman cowered over the expiring embers of the wood fire, fixing her deep-sunk and maliciously gleaming eyes on him with a look

of mingled fear and hatred. He was well armed, besides the long keen whittle or knife with which he was cutting his food; and so fierce and savage was his whole appearance, that Constance, with instinctive terror, laid her hand on the yeoman's arm, and drew him on one side, out of sight of the ill-favoured pair within the dwelling. Whilst she hesitated whether to enter the hut, and boldly speak her errand, or return to the farm, the loud voice of the ruffian broke the silence; every word he uttered was distinctly audible to his unwilling listeners.

'And now thou knowest thy doom, grandam,' he said harshly: 'one word more about the girl, and I cut thy old tongue out. Thou hast so long pretended dealings with the Evil One, that the wiseacres would judge it his doing, and thou wouldst find it hard to tell who really did the deed.' He laughed horribly, and the terrified waiting-woman would have fled from the spot, had not her lady held her back, and motioned her to remain and be silent.

'I will never speak of her again, good Dickon;' and the hag's voice was tremulous with fear. 'I did but jeer the proud quean about her daughter. I never named thy master, boy.'

'T is the better for thee,' was the reply; 'and truly thou hadst no cause to jeer her. The damsel is a wedded wife and a great lady, though none but herself will ever know it. A serviceable priest married her to her good lord, and I was the only witness; we are neither of us likely to refresh his memory about the ceremony, should he choose to forget it altogether.'

Giles Perrot made a hasty step forward, but his trembling companion caught his arm.

'Hist, Giles!' she whispered; 'let us hence with all speed, and send some men-at-arms from Leighton to seize this wretch.'

Bethink thee, he is well armed, and thou hast but thy quarter-staff. Let us hasten to the village.'

With sullen reluctance the yeoman obeyed her mandate, for all fear had vanished from his bold English heart, now it appeared possible by earthly means to win tidings of his child; but the safety of the lady might be perilled by his acting as he would have done if alone; he refrained, therefore, from making the villain feel the weight of his quarter-staff, and with rapid strides followed the fleet footsteps of the breathless and terrified fugitives. Constance directed her course to the Manor, instead of returning to the farm, and not a word was uttered by any of the party till they had reached the village. The lady then addressed Perrot.

'We shall, I trust, secure the ruffian, good Giles,' she said, 'and learn who this most base and false-hearted knight is. Thou shalt have a strong party from the Hall to take the villain, and then thou canst return and comfort poor Maud with the tidings thou hast heard but now.'

'My honoured lady,' said the yeoman, gratefully, 'we are bound to you for life, for your great goodness. I thank Heaven and our Lady that Alinor is not as erring as we deemed her. But the silly wench hath wrecked her own happiness; for, doubtless, if her knightly husband be discovered, he will wreak his vengeance for the exposure on her ill-fated head. My only hope is, that he may be induced to restore her to us, and that we may teach her to forget the past.'

'I trust you may regain her, poor damsel!' answered the lady. 'Such an unequal union could be easily dissolved, methinks, and no happiness can be expected for her in its continuance. But here is Leighton, and my dear lady and mother coming to chide me for my long absence.'

The Lady Pauncefort listened with astonishment to the hurried tale of her adopted daughter, as they retraced their steps towards the Hall, and by her orders a party of men-at-arms was soon in readiness to follow the bereaved father to the witch's hut.

Father Dennis was summoned by Dame Edith as soon as they had departed, and heard with amazement and regret the strange tale of Alinor's flight. Who the knight could be, that had so failed in the observance of his chivalrous vows as to repay the hospitality of the good knight of Leighton by the abduction of his vassal, they found it impossible to divine. For an instant only the suspicions of Constance de Lingard rested on the nephew of Lord Fitzwalter. His conduct had shown a want of principle, that rendered it by no means improbable he should have been guilty of a baseness as heinous as that of the unknown offender; but then his avowed love for herself could scarcely be reconciled with even a passing fancy for poor Alinor Perrot.

The interval of time which elapsed from the departure of the yeoman till his return appeared of interminable length, and the Lady Pauncefort had more than once sent an attendant to the warder's tower to learn if the party were yet discernible, before the challenge from the warder and the noise of the lowered drawbridge announced their return. Both ladies and the priest moved eagerly forward as the yeoman and his followers entered the hall; but Constance uttered an exclamation of disappointment as she perceived that the old woman was the only prisoner they brought with them.

'Where is the villain thou soughtest, good Giles?' asked the lady, eagerly.

'Escaped, my honoured lady,' was the reply; 'gone ere we

reached the hut; nor can we discover any trace of him, though we have searched in all directions round the common.'

'An evil chance,' said the lady. 'Thou hast brought the woman?'

'Ay, madam, but she is obstinately silent, and will give no tidings either of the ruffian or of my daughter.'

'Bring her forward, Hugh,' said the dame, resuming her seat upon the dais with a stern dignity; 'we occupy for a time the place of our absent lord, and will allow of no wrong to our vassals.'

Two stout archers now advanced, leading the crone between them, and, divesting her of the large cloak in which they had enveloped her, displayed to the lady the face and form of an exceedingly aged and infirm woman. Her long grey matted locks had escaped from her coif in her forced and hurried walk, and hung on her shoulders and round a face so attenuated and drawn by countless wrinkles, that it looked scarcely human. Her eyes, deep-set, yet sharp and piercing, had a wild uncertain expression, and as she found herself in the sudden presence of those whom from their own rank and her degraded condition she at once feared and hated, her thin lips moved convulsively, displaying her toothless gums, and the long crooked fingers worked nervously, as if clutching at an invisible support. The domestics, who stood near, drew back in superstitious terror, and even Father Dennis signed the cross and muttered an exorcism.

'Woman,' said Dame Edith, sternly, repressing the shudder of momentary fear and horror which had been caused by her first glance at the object before her, 'what knowest thou of the lost maiden, Alinor Perrot? Answer truly, if thou wouldst escape punishment.'



'Alinor Perrot!' answered the old woman, in the shrill, tremulous accents of age; 'alack! noble lady, what should I know of her? What dealings could the old crone, as *she* aye called me, have with the yeoman's dainty daughter?'

'Palter not with me, woman,' said the lady; 'thou didst tell the maiden's mother that her child was in a knightly castle, and the Lady Constance hath this evening heard thy ruffianly guest tell thee that she was wedded to his master. I demand of thee the knight's name, and I charge thee answer me truly,—nor needst thou fear that harm shall chance to thee for so doing.'

The hag did not immediately reply, but glanced rapidly and fearfully around her.

'I may not,' she said, at length, in an audible and thrilling whisper; 'they forbid me.'

'They! Whom meanest thou?'

'The fiends,' she replied, in the same low hissing tone; 'they who are ever near me; they who sit with me in my lonely hut, and glare on me in the darkness with their fiery eyes. They bid me spare him, and let him prosper, till he be fit for them.'

She spoke rapidly and with vehemence, and the listeners involuntarily shrank back with superstitious horror. The attendant women uttered a faint shriek, and the lady's cheek grew pale, as she listened to ravings, to which the superstition of the age gave an awful reality.

'I fear me, father,' she said, turning to the priest, 'that we have a foul and unholy witch here, whom it becometh rather your sacred calling to examine, than a sinful and inexperienced woman like myself.'

'You are right, daughter,' said the friar. 'This unhappy creature is doubtless either one of those possessed ones, of whom Holy Writ speaketh, or a servant of the Enemy, of whom

it is written, "Thou shalt not suffer such a one to live." Speak, woman!' he added; 'I adjure thee in the Name at which fiends tremble! Hast thou given thine immortal soul to the Evil One, or canst thou still defy Satan and his works?'

The insane being whom he thus addressed answered with a hideous laugh, which made even the stout men-at-arms shrink from beside her.

'For what should I sell myself?' she asked, in a mocking tone; 'for the keen hunger, the parching thirst, which are relieved only by *one* more hateful in my eyes than the dark ones who haunt me?—for the dreary solitude—for the shuddering curses of my kind? These are all I possess; think ye that for these pleasures I have sold myself?—I called them not,' she continued, resuming her former whisper; 'they came to me as I watched beside the dead, and told me their dark secrets, and bade me curse those who scorned me; and where that curse fell came ever sorrow and sin.'

'Unhappy woman,' said the Franciscan, 'thy words are surely the ravings of madness. Do any of you know,' he added, addressing the awe-struck crowd of domestics and men-at-arms, 'whether this woman hath her reason in the ordinary affairs of life?'

'Ay, truly hath she, holy father,' answered Hugh the steward; 'but I have heard my father say she was once crazy for a long time. It was when her only daughter died. For as long as I can remember, she hath had more wit than she could fairly come by, seeing she hath greater skill than any leech in the cure of an ague or fever, and never threatens or promises her neighbours aught in vain. Moreover, since the damsel her daughter died, they say she hath hated a fair face, and hath been ever ready to work it harm.'

‘Hath she a son?’

‘No, father, but she has a grandson—a wild reckless villain, who fled from her some four years ago, and joined the bands of robbers that infest Hampshire. It is very likely that her visitor was this Dickon, who is a common bravo and ruffian, at the hire of any who will pay for his villanous services.’

‘The matter must be more narrowly inquired into,’ said the friar; ‘in the meanwhile, my daughter,’ turning to the lady, ‘I would advise you to confine the woman closely. She may, perhaps, be induced to confess any share she has had in the abduction of the damsel Perrot, or, at least, to reveal the name of the unknown knight. In the morning I will write to my good lord your husband, and crave to know his pleasure with regard to her, and likewise inform him of the injury offered to his vassal.’

‘It shall be done, father,’ replied the lady. ‘Hugh, thou wilt see to her safe keeping till thy lord’s return, and suffer her to hold intercourse with no one. Dost hear, woman? Wilt thou yet escape thy threatened punishment by revealing this false knight’s name?’

‘Tortures may not tear it from me whilst they forbid it,’ she answered, more wildly. ‘What is the horror of the darkest dungeon to his wrath—the fiend!’

‘Peace, sorceress!’ said the friar, loudly. ‘Speak not thy blasphemies in this presence; thy confession now would avail thee not. Thou hast boldly avowed thy unholy compact with evil, and it is fitting that the Church prove and try thee, to chastise or acquit thee, as it may see best. The Abbot of Westburn is a shrewd judge of such matters, and he will be a severe punisher of thy crime.’

At the name of an ecclesiastic who had more than once

proved his zeal against the unhappy beings stigmatized as witches, a low murmur passed among the attendants, but the old woman heard the threat in silence, and was removed from the hall, wearing the same air of dogged resolution she had exhibited throughout her examination. The ladies and the confessor then withdrew, and the domestics congregated together in little groups, discussing with eager interest the scene that had just passed, and relating many instances of the miraculous powers possessed by the unfortunate maniac, whom they affirmed neither bolts nor bars would retain, if it pleased her to escape, unless the term of her compact with the Evil One had expired.

The indignation with which Sir Grimbald Pauncefort heard of the foul insult offered to his feudal authority, and the injury wrought in the family of his vassal, was only equalled by his horror at the discovery that an avowed slave of Satan had so long polluted his demesnes. The answer which a few days brought to the priest's missive, gave him full power to surrender the aged culprit to the tribunal of the neighbouring abbot, whose zeal against the professors of witchcraft was probably strengthened by the suspicions which the dawning fame of the learned Bacon had aroused against the Franciscan Order itself, as being infected with a desire for unholy and unlawful knowledge. Father Dennis, who was himself an intelligent scholar, and would have repelled an accusation of sorcery against his brother priest as absurd and calumnious, was yet so far under the dominion of the superstitions of his age as to believe and shudder at the avowal of subjection to Satanic influences, made by the half-crazy prisoner. But neither abbot nor confessor was, in this instance, destined to wage a successful warfare against the empire of darkness, by the punishment of one of its sub-

jects; for, on the morning fixed for the removal of the prisoner to Westburn, it was discovered—to the great consternation of her jailer, and the inhabitants of Leighton generally—that she had effected her escape. How, or in what manner—unless by supernatural means—was, and remained, a mystery. Search was made for her vainly, and the belief that the master to whom she had given herself had carried her away bodily, alone accounted for her disappearance, and furnished (with a few additions of the marvellous) another winter's tale to the domestics of the ancient Manor. Equally ineffectual were all efforts to discover the retreat of Alinor Perrot; and as weeks flew on, and brought no tidings of her, hope vanished from the sorrowing family of the farm, and the stern grief of the yeoman and the half-frantic woe of his wife subsided into the sullen apathy of despair.



## CHAPTER V.

### THE UNSEEN WITNESS.

Prosper you, sweet sir!—Your purse is not hot enough  
to purchase your spice. *Winter's Tale.*

**I**N a small apartment near the top of a lonely tower in Oxfordshire, about three weeks after her disappearance from Leighton, sat the yeoman's daughter. She was alone,

and looked pale and sorrowful, though she was richly attired and surrounded by many luxuries. From time to time she rose, and walked languidly to the loophole which commanded a view of the road to the city, as if weary of her solitude or in expectation of the arrival of some visitor. A key, grating harshly in the lock of the door, roused her from the fit of listless abstraction in which she stood gazing forth on the summer landscape, and she turned eagerly, but drew back with a slight shudder, as the same ruffian who had been seen by the Lady Constance in the witch's hut, entered.

'Where tarries my lord?' she asked, hastily.

'Thy lord, and my very good master,' answered the ruffian, with a sneer; 'hath business which will prevent his visiting thee to-day.'

'Alas!' said the girl, 'it is many days since I have seen him. Surely he might trust to my promise, that I will reveal our marriage to no one, and not keep me a prisoner. I have such a deep longing to tread the green fields once more.'

'Nay, he fears not thy revealing the secret, for who would credit thy tale?—true though it be. But sundry researches have been made after his runaway vassal, by the Knight of Leighton and his son, who are even now in Oxford, with the yeoman Perrot; and it were scarce prudent of my master to let his pretty bird take flight yet, lest he lose her.'

'The good old knight!' exclaimed Alinor, sadly; 'he pities my poor father, my almost childless mother—perhaps even their undutiful and ungrateful child.'

'He is more likely moved by resentment at the insult to his own authority; and it would rouse my Lord Fitzwalter's anger against his nephew, grievously, had he the remotest suspicion that Sir Edmund was the robber of the yeoman's snug nest. I

laugh in my sleeve, by St. Nicholas! when I see how the old knight and Sir Edward trust him and crave his aid to discover and punish the traitor and caitiff knight.'

'And this deceiver—this false friend—is my husband!' said Alinor, rather to herself than her companion.

'Ay,' replied Dickon, 'and thou art bound to obey him; and his behest is, that thou stir not beyond the walls of this tower till the Paunceforts have left Oxford. Go to,—why shouldst thou complain? I am obliged to move out with caution myself at present, for thy father caught a glimpse of me in my old grandam's hut (so Sir Grimbold told my master), and might perchance recognize me, did he see me again. Thy captivity will not last long.'

'I will not murmur,' she replied, meekly; 'I have only myself to reproach for my fate, be it what it may. Commend me to my lord, good Dickon, and say I humbly obey him.'

'Thou sayest well; but I may not bear thy message to Sir Edmund now, for the reasons I told thee of. I must not be known as his follower. Fare thee well, mistress, I am bound to Oxford. Old Joan will bring thy dinner to thee, and give thee the benefit of her company, an' it like thee.'

The bravo left the room, and Alinor soon after saw him pursuing with hasty steps the winding road towards the city. It was no small portion of the punishment of her error, for the child of the merry greenwood to look forth from the loophole on the meadows, gay in their golden livery of buttercups—on the waving trees over which the ever-varying shadows played—and to listen to the dying music of the lark's love-song, floating on the air from the warm skies above her, and feel herself a captive.

But we will leave her to solitude and her sad and regretful

thoughts, whilst we follow Dickon to the good city of Oxford. The genius of our first great philosopher had not, at this period, so fully displayed itself as it did a few years afterwards; but his wonderful skill in mathematics, and his discoveries in science, had already obtained the fame of a magician for Friar Roger Bacon. Immersed in his deep and abstract studies, the Franciscan was little aware that, during his frequent visits to the monastery of his order in the metropolis, his attendants made a traffic of such secrets of science as came necessarily to their knowledge, whilst employed by him in the laboratory of Oxford, and that many a piece of gold repaid the revelations which the newly discovered magic lantern made to the credulous peasants of the neighbourhood. An acquaintance formed at an ale-house with Ralph, the servant of the priest, and an hour's listening over the tankard to the marvellous legends of his master's art, had inspired the ruffianly follower of Edmund Fitzwalter with a strong desire to know his own future fate, and he took advantage of the certainty of his lord's absence from the tower, to steal back to the town, resolved—as soon as the hour for consulting the genius of the lamp should arrive—to visit his new friend in the absent friar's cell, and see his future destiny in magic pictures.

It was past midday when Dickon reached the city, and, as he deemed it prudent to avoid the possibility of meeting his young master in the streets, he entered an obscure hostelry, where, calling for a jug of ale, and seating himself in the least conspicuous place in the huge kitchen, he amused himself by alternately drinking and surveying the different groups around him, some of whom were country people who had brought that morning the produce of their farms to the city; others, the lower order of citizens and burghers, who answered his scowling



glances with looks of suspicion, which his rude appearance amply justified. Immediately opposite to him on the other side of the wide chimney, the neighbourhood of which, from the heat of the weather, was eschewed by the generality of the guests, stood a tall, stout, and simple-looking countryman, attired in a long frock of coarse but snow-white linen, ornamented with broidery in blue thread round the neck. He was in earnest discourse with the red-armed kitchen-maid, who was already making preparations for supper, and their conversation speedily riveted the attention of their ill-favoured neighbour.

‘I wish thou couldst have been at our sheep-shearing, Alice,’ said the churl; ‘but thy mistress will not hear of it. There hath never been such a feast at the farm before. The women folk have sent me for currants, prunes, saffron, mace, and I wot not what besides, and here is a heavy purse to pay for my purchases.’

He exhibited as he spoke a huge and apparently well-filled leather bag.

‘’T is a shame of mistress to say me nay,’ returned the girl, sullenly. ‘I had not come to live servant at a hostelry, an’ I had thought I should not have a holiday to go to my old place at the sheep-shearing; and I a free maiden! But I will not stay here much longer, trust me.’

‘It is a brave town to live in, though, Alice: I scarce knew which way to look this morning, as I traversed it, there be so many grand sights in it.’

‘But I am never let out,’ was the reply, ‘and therefore see them not. ’T is “Alice!” here, “Alice!” there, from morn till eventide. I have scarce a moment to myself, e’en on Sundays.’

‘Well, if I marry Judith of Langburn, thou shalt take service with us, an’ thou wilt. It is to know whether she will say

yea to my suit, that I would fain consult the wise man who lives in this city.'

'What, Ralph!' said the girl, turning pale; 'you surely would not be so daring? They say, that though Friar Roger be a priest, he hath dealings with the devil, and that Satan hath given him a wonderful instrument, by means of which he can see miles away from the spot he standeth on, and even through brick walls.'

'The saints defend us!' ejaculated the churl. 'And can he show one the face of her who is to be one's wife?'

'Ay, marry, can he! But go not to him, my good young master, for old mistress's sake: what would become of her, if evil should chance to you?'

'Tush, Alice! what cowards ye women be! I thank the saints I fear nor man nor devil; and with reason, seeing I wear a bit of the true cross, which I bought last Easter of a holy pilgrim; and if *that* will not scare away the fiends, I know not what will.'

This last argument was too convincing for the girl to refute.

'And now, Alice,' he continued, 'which is the road to the friar's tower?'

'Of a truth, that I know not; but some of the guests will, perhaps, be going near that way after supper, and may direct thee.'

A call from the hostess hurried the damsel away, and the churl, seating himself on the settle, amused himself by whistling, and perhaps meditating upon the 'to be or not to be' of his fair Judith, his eyes fixed on the smoky rafters, unconscious of the fixed gaze of Dickon, whose busy fancy had already transferred the leather pouch from the clown's possession to his own.

The noisy inn supper was at last over, and, armed with a heavy cudgel, the worthy rustic was preparing to depart, when he was startled by the pressure of a heavy hand upon his shoulder, and, turning, met the scowling eyes of Dickon. Brave as he had professed himself to be, a sensation of fear shot through the heart of the churl.

‘What wouldst thou with me?’ he asked, tremulously.

‘Saidst thou not that thou wouldst fain visit the friar’s cell?’ was the abrupt demand.

‘I did, so please you,’ answered the rustic.

‘I am bound on the same journey. If thou wilt bear me company, I can show thee a near road thither.’

The peasant hesitated; but in spite of his faith in the blessed relic he wore, his awe of Beelzebub and his myrmidons was greater than his fear of any mere mortal, and the hope of having a companion in his wished yet dreaded visit overcame the momentary antipathy with which he had regarded his new acquaintance. He therefore accepted the stranger’s proffered guidance, and, wholly ignorant of the localities, and of where the tower occupied by the supposed magician was, passed the gates with his guide, and was speedily lost in the thick woods which lay beyond the city of Oxford.

Two hours afterwards the ruffian stood alone, with the pretended adept, in the chamber consecrated by the studies of the immortal Franciscan. A golden bribe had opened the sanctuary to Fitzwalter’s bravo, and the friar’s servitor, Ralph, stood beside him, magnifying the favour he had conferred on his rude visitor, and entreating him to submit to a temporary delay in the gratification of his curiosity.

‘Till yonder red orb has fully set, good Dickon,’ he continued, ‘the spirits who work in darkness may not be constrained.

Tarry but till sunset, and they shall show thee what thou desirest.'

'Of a truth saith the proverb, "'Tis not the cowl that makes the friar." Thy master hath, then, dealings with the devil?'

'I said not that,' replied the servitor; 'but by means of his great knowledge the holy father hath made himself feared by all the powers of nature, who obey him and come at his bidding, even as he can likewise lay the wicked spirits, who molest good Christians, in the Red Sea.'

Dickon nodded significantly.

'Ay, ay! thou dost well to be wary, Master Ralph. Magic is an ugly crime to commit now-a-days, as my old grandam had well-nigh proved. 'I will tarry thy pleasure and rest me here, for of a truth I have had a rough walk.'

'And a fall by the way, methinks,' said Ralph, 'for there is both blood and mud upon your knee. Are you much hurt?'

'A slight cut, a mere scratch,' muttered the ruffian, a deep hue suffusing his swarthy countenance. 'I will sit down and rest me.'

The lay brother cast a hasty glance round the chamber, to satisfy himself probably that nothing capable of tempting the cupidity of the ill-favoured visitor was exposed to his view, and then excusing himself by the plea of urgent business, left the man-at-arms to his own reflections. Dickon's first care, when he found himself alone, was to rub the mud on his knee over the dark red stain, to which Ralph had directed his attention. When satisfied that it was completely concealed, he thrust his hand into the bosom of his vest, and drew forth the leather bag which the incautious rustic had so proudly displayed, and after examining its contents with great satisfaction, returned it to its hiding-place. He then rose and began

to examine the apartment with mingled awe and curiosity. The scrolls and mathematical instruments which lay on the large table in the centre of the room first riveted his gaze; but esteeming them the cabalistic spells with which the great magician summoned the powers of evil before him, he turned from them with superstitious fear, muttering an ejaculation—half-prayer, half-oath—and proceeded to scrutinize the cabinets and heavy boxes and drawers which filled the farther end of the chamber; but they were securely fastened, and he feared to exert force for the gratification of his curiosity or avarice, lest the monk's attendant should return. The progress of this scrutiny had brought him near the small loophole of the turret, immediately beneath which stood a small table covered with scrolls, having on it, also, an instrument of unknown form, which the ruffian took up and eagerly examined. The place in which it was deposited probably suggested to him the possibility that it might be the magic gift which the inn-maid asserted the Prince of Darkness had bestowed on his disciple. He took it up with a sensation of terror, which his natural boldness and audacity could not wholly overcome, and glanced fearfully round him, in the expectation of seeing some terrible and diabolical guardian of its mystic powers stand before him, to punish his presumption. But all was still and unchanged in the quiet chamber, and with renewed courage he raised the tube to his eye, and an instant afterwards gazed forth long and eagerly on the distant landscape, directing his gaze involuntarily to that part of the woodland, near the city, which he had recently left. The setting sun had wholly sunk beneath the horizon ere he laid the wonderful instrument down, with a long-drawn breath and a muttered oath.

'An' thou be indeed a gift from the devil,' he muttered,

apostrophizing it, 'thou must have well pleased thy giver, by the sight thou hast shown me but now. 'T was a deed too dark for man to have dreamed without him, methinks! A sworn comrade and friend! It passes belief! 'T is a rare secret for me to hold, though, and shall make my clown's leather bag—like the fabled purse in the grandam's tale—never empty.'

He remained musing on what he had seen, on the same spot. The sun had, as we have said, set; and the chamber was already in the gloom of twilight. Dickon, late actor in, and now witness of, a scene of horror, stood in the supposed sanctuary of a necromancer, in the mysterious and silent chamber of supernatural power and unholy studies, alone; and, hardened as his brutal nature was, it could not support the cold, creeping chill of superstitious fear, that awoke his sleeping conscience to the terrors of guilt, and of its future doom. The forms of the simple articles of furniture in the student's peaceful cell appeared to him to dilate and look frowningly upon him, and the shadows at his feet to take the dark hue of blood. Unable longer to endure that fearful solitude, he rushed from the chamber down the winding staircase, on which he encountered Ralph, ascending with a large box beneath his arm. In his furious haste he had nearly overthrown the *soi-disant* magician, who caught him by the arm, with an exclamation of astonishment, adding,

'Whither goest thou so fast, good Dickon?—art weary of waiting? The hour for calling before thee the shadows of future events is come. Wilt thou not return, and gaze on the magic shadows?'

'The foul fiend run away with thee and thy magic shadows to boot,' growled the ruffian; 'let me out of thy devil's den forthwith!'

'But the gold thou didst bestow on me erewhile?'

'Thou mayest keep it,' muttered Dickon, with an oath; 'let me out of thy den, I bid thee, an' thou wouldst keep whole bones.'

The pretended adept no longer offered to detain him, and in a few minutes Dickon stood outside the friar's tower. Freedom and the fresh air restored his wonted daring, and after a momentary pause, in which he took his resolution for his future proceedings, he hurried forth from the city—to escape being shut within the closed gates—and directed his hasty steps towards the spot which had so long riveted his gaze from the turret loophole.



## CHAPTER VI.

### THE SCROLL.

Wash your hands, put on your night-gown,  
Look not so pale.

*Macbeth.*

**A** LONG and weary day had the one whose events we have recorded been to Alinor in her lonely tower. As his wife only had Fitzwalter been able to induce her to abandon the home of her youth, but he had, at the same time, exacted an oath from her, that she would reveal their union to

no one till he should permit. Dazzled by the prospect of a fate beyond her wildest dreams—unreflecting, vain, and ambitious—the yeoman's daughter, in her trusting ignorance and deep devotion to her noble lover, never doubted that such permission would hereafter (when circumstances allowed) be granted. She triumphed already in imagination over her village rivals and companions, and exulted in the proud joy of her parents when they should learn she was a knight's lady—the wife of the great Baron Fitzwalter's nephew—heedless of the deep, heart-breaking sorrow with which they would mourn over her abandonment of their age. But fearful suspicions of the real fate awaiting her had in that long day's solitude floated through her brain. She felt she was a captive—that she had exchanged freedom for thralldom—a spotless name for a doubtful reputation—with but a faint and every-day diminishing hope of ever attaining the station for which she had perilled so much; and, as evening closed in, she threw herself on the couch, still dressed in the rich attire in which her lover had decked her, and wept herself to sleep. Her troubled slumber had lasted many hours, when it was broken by the grasp of a cold hand on her arm, and starting up, she found her husband standing beside her. The light of a lamp which he held fell on his face; it was pale, and his fine dark hair hung dishevelled and damp round it. The girl gazed upon him in speechless surprise.

'Arise, Alinor,' he said, hoarsely, 'and help me to unfasten my wet mantle. I know not the trick of the clasping, and Dickon is not in the tower.'

She rose and hurriedly obeyed him, gazing timidly and affectionately in his face, as she expressed her joy at seeing him so unexpectedly.



'The rain must, indeed, be heavy,' she said, as she removed the rich velvet mantle from his shoulders and laid it aside; 'your cloak is quite wet through.' She turned as she spoke towards the lamp, and uttered a faint shriek.

'Fool!' cried the knight, harshly, 'what ails thee?'

'My hands are stained with blood!' she gasped forth; 'Edmund, dear Edmund, are you wounded?'

'No, no, thou silly moppet,' he replied, in a softened tone, 'I am scathless, but I come from a fearful scene of death.' He shuddered as he spoke. The damsel fixed her large hazel eyes on him, with terror and anxiety in her looks.

'Be not alarmed, Alinor,' he continued: 'I would fain have concealed the horrid event from you, had not my stained garment partially revealed it. Sir Edward Pauncefort has been foully murdered.'

He paused in great agitation, and the yeoman's daughter, uttering a low scream, sank upon a chair, gazing on her blood-stained hands in silent and agonized horror. It was the blood of her mother's foster-child—of the benefactor of her family; and by whom shed? Her heart reproached her for the horrible suspicion that for a moment rushed into her mind, and, struggling with her fears, she rose and took Fitzwalter's hand.

'My dearest lord,' she said, soothingly,—'your early and true friend, who loved you as a brother! I marvel not at your grief; alas! I share it with you! He was ever kind and gentle to me and mine. May Heaven's vengeance pursue the murderer, and give him the due guerdon of his crime!'

'Peace, girl!' said her husband sternly, snatching his hand from her, and hurriedly pacing the chamber; 'he who did the deed died by my hand.—It was in the thick wood near Oxford,' he continued, speaking with difficulty, 'that he—Pauncefor'







*Alinor Perrot's alarm.*



—was slain. Passing accidentally near the spot, I heard a shrill cry, and proceeding in the direction from whence it came, I found a robber bending over his victim, in the act of plundering the dead. I slew the caitiff on the spot, but came too late to save my friend, who had been stabbed in the back by the wretch with a whittle. I sent Dickon, who was with me, to the city, to arouse the burghers and bring aid. They have borne the bodies into the town, and I hurried hither to change my wet and stained garments, and snatch a brief rest, ere I return to certify the particulars of the dark deed to the magistrates.’

He was silent, and the only reply to his dreadful communication was the deep sobbing of the vassal of Leighton Manor. The day on which she had first attracted an admiration so fatal to her happiness, recurred suddenly to her memory. She again beheld her young lord’s open handsome face, his kind sweet smile ; and he lay dead—murdered—cut off in the morning of his life, on the eve of his bridal, by the knife of an unknown and infamous assassin ! Sincere and bitter were the tears shed to his memory by his nurse’s child, and for a time she was permitted to indulge them unreprieved ; but at length Edmund spoke again, and the fierce irritation of his manner startled her from her trance of grief.

‘Enough weeping, girl !’ he said ; ‘tears cannot bring back the dead. My own feelings need not the aggravation of seeing your regret, real or affected. Cease your moaning, and wash your hands. Faugh ! have you no sweet essences to overcome this smell of the shambles ?’

Alinor had risen in silence to obey him, when the step of a heavy foot was heard on the stairs, and the next instant the ruffian Dickon entered the apartment. His dress was much disordered and blood-stained, and he moved unsteadily, as if

he had been indulging in the wine-cup, whilst his eyes had a savage ferocity of expression which made Alinor shudder. She fancied, for a moment, that her feelings of disgust and horror were shared by her husband; but, if they were, he succeeded instantly in subduing them, and in a calm tone addressed the intruder.

'Well, good fellow,' he said, 'hast thou fulfilled thy task?'

'Ay, and I bear to your knightship the thanks and commendations of their worships the magistrates, for the deed of justice you have wrought on the caitiff murderer,' replied the villain, with a hoarse laugh. 'Their worships pray you to give them your presence at the Town Hall to-morrow, as early as may be convenient to you.'

'They shall be obeyed,' said the knight. 'Doth Sir Grimbold Pauncefort know——.' He paused, much agitated.

'Ay, he knows it, and is well-nigh mad with grief for the loss of his favourite son. He hath sent off an express to London to summon the young esquire of the Temple down forthwith. The magistrates are much moved by the knight's sorrow, and the whole city is in a state of terror and confusion.'

'T is no marvel. Dickon, thou mayest go and change thy garments; I want thy assistance myself, unless Richard Trafford be arrived.'

'That is he not,' replied the ruffian; 'I am the only attendant here at present, save kitchen wenches and stable boys; but, as usual, I am ready to serve your honour to the best of my power, be it in donning another garment, or——.'

'I doubt not thy zeal,' interrupted the knight hastily, 'and will follow thee straight to my own chamber. Go, good Dickon.'

'I would first crave a cup of wine of this fair lady,' said

Dickon, with a rude familiarity of manner that startled Alinor, who gazed in silent wonder on the scene : ' I am sore athirst '

The girl glanced timidly towards her husband. He coloured deeply, and evidently conquered his rising anger at his follower's impertinence by a strong effort.

' Give him to drink, Alinor,' he said, ' if thou hast any wine here.'

A flask remained standing by the untouched supper on the table ; she obeyed, poured out a cup, and presented it with sickening loathing to the already half-intoxicated bravo. He drained it to the bottom, and then replacing it on the table, left the room. Fitzwalter shortly after followed, and returned no more.

As the cold grey light of a misty and cheerless morning dawned, Alinor, who had passed the intervening time in tears and indefinable dread, heard the drawbridge lowered, and hurrying to the window, beheld the knight and his attendant, mounted, riding forth side by side ; the latter talking with a bold familiarity of manner to his haughty master, which he apparently neither resented nor checked. She turned from the loophole, and the stained mantle caught her eye. With a shudder, she lifted it from the couch and rolled it together, in hopes of concealing the dark stain, till the morning visit of her old attendant should enable her to send it from the room. As she did so a scroll fell from the folds. She raised it, and gazed on it with excited but vain curiosity. The characters traced on it were a mystery to her, but it resembled the vellum on which she had seen the Lady Constance painting gay missal borders ; and, scarcely knowing wherefore, she concealed it carefully before she summoned the old woman—who was her only attendant and companion during the absence of her hus-



band—and then lying down again, closed her eyes, and yielded to the stupor of fatigue, sorrow, and fear, which overpowered her.



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE OXFORD MURDER.

*Pandulph.* You hold too heinous a respect of grief.

*Constance.* He talks to me that never had a son!

SHAKSPEARE.

I N the chamber of an inn at Oxford sat, in the daybreak of that sad morning, the Knight of Leighton, and beside him, on a rude oaken table, lay the body of his eldest son. The corse was folded in a gay mantle of green velvet, now saturated with blood, with which the fair hair of the corpse was also dabbled. The slain youth had grasped his dagger—the only weapon he wore—and the fingers kept their hold tenaciously even in death. The pale features were calm; but one who knew the circumstances of his fate might have imagined that an expression of surprise and indignation yet lingered on their stillness. The father held the hand of the dead knight in his own, and, unrestrained by the presence of his attendants, and of a leech, and the priest who stood near him, bathed it with tears of passionate grief.

'My son,' he murmured, 'my own brave boy! To die by the hand of a churl, of a low-born peasant,—cut off in the very spring-time of his existence, ere he had won the fame which a Pauncefort hath ever carried with him to the grave. Alas! father, what sin have I committed so heinous as to deserve this heavy chastisement of Heaven?'

'My son,' said the monk, 'you speak unadvisedly. We have the warrant of Holy Writ for believing that affliction is not always sent as a punishment for sin, but often rather as a proof of our heavenly Father's love for us. "Whom He loveth He chasteneth;" and the inspired prophet saith, "None consider that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come." Who can tell what trials of earth the freed spirit of thy first-born may have escaped?'

'But to die alone—violently—unassoiled, father! Bid thy brethren say masses for his soul. I will well repay their holy zeal,' exclaimed the knight, in broken accents. 'Alas, my son! that this proof of love alone should remain to me.'

His head again sank on the hand of the dead, and his strong frame shook in the agony of his convulsive emotion. The priest looked pityingly on him, and gently kneeling beside the corse, began in a low but clear voice to recite the prayers for the dead. Erring and vain though such prayers may be, there is ever in the words of supplication to the great Father of spirits a healing and soothing power. As the bereaved father listened—at first half-unconsciously—to the monk's murmured tones, the passion of his grief subsided. With a strong effort he raised his head, and 'summoned all his courage round his heart,' to endure his sorrow as befitted a Christian warrior, manfully and firmly; and when, after the lapse of about an hour, an attendant announced the Baron Fitzwalter (who had arrived

at Oxford the preceding day, and hastened at the first intelligence of his young favourite's fate to offer such comfort as he could bestow on the afflicted parent), he was able to greet with tolerable composure the patron and friend of his slain Edward. The lord of Baynard's Castle had tendered the gallant-spirited young man—who had long dwelt beneath his roof, and been reared under his care—as a son; and, as he grasped the hand of the Knight of Leighton, and gazed on the fair-haired youth who lay in the sleep of death before him, emotion choked his utterance, and he dashed the big tears from his eyes, but little used to such symptoms of weakness.

'I know not how to comfort you, Sir Grimbald,' he said at length, 'in your heavy affliction. In faith, I need consolation nearly as much as you do, for I loved the poor boy as well as my own heir. Well, peace be with his spirit! We must all die sooner or later, old comrade; albeit, the manner of our Edward's death is ever to be lamented. I would the caitiff murderer were alive again, that we might wreak our vengeance on him, for daring to lift his butcherly knife against a gallant gentleman! It had been far better if Edmund had secured him instead of slaying him so hastily; but he meant well.'

'And I owe him deep thanks,' said Pauncefort, 'for the aid he would have afforded to my Edward.' His voice trembled. 'I cannot forget that he tarried alone in the dark and (it was too plain) dangerous woods, with his dead friend, till his servant brought the tardy aid of Oxford to him.'

'He could do no less,' answered the Baron, 'Edward and he having been sworn brothers from early childhood, all unlike as they were in disposition. My nephew hath many foibles, but his love for his young comrade was ever his redeeming quality.'

I met him entering the city as I came hither, and would have brought him with me, but he refused to come, and when I looked on his pale, haggard face, I could not urge it. He commended him to you by me.'

'I thank him for all,' said Sir Grimbald; 'from this last night he has become to me as a son, and may command me in all things, as I shall presently tell him in person. But is it not near the time when our presence was required by the magistrery at the Town Hall?'

'It is,' replied Lord Fitzwalter; 'I came to offer you my company thither. The body of the murderer, pursued by the hisses and execrations of the populace, hath been already borne there. Shall we set forth at once? I have ever found that action is the best antidote for grief, save Time.'

With a mute lingering look of anguish on the face of the dead, the Knight of Leighton obeyed the impulse of the hand laid on his arm to draw him from the chamber, and followed the Lord Fitzwalter down the narrow stairs to the inn door, where their horses and attendants awaited them. It was a dismal morning. As if the clouds sympathized in the gloom and horror which the recent crime had cast over the good city of Oxford, they had congregated in thick masses, veiling the brow of heaven with their murky vapours, and suffering not the feeble sunbeams to break through and speak of comfort; pouring down also a heavy drizzling rain, which the cold, damp morning air beat sullenly against the faces of the knight and the Baron, as they rode through crowded streets to the Town Hall. For the unseasonable and unpleasant weather could not prevent men, women, and children from assembling outside the place of magisterial inquiry, and even the portly dispensers of justice themselves were heedless of the damp atmosphere, so much

had the awful murder, committed as it were beneath their very eyes, excited and alarmed them.

The Hall was crowded at an early hour by all the knightly and noble dwellers in or near the city who had heard of the approaching investigation ; their indignation burning the more fiercely against the slain assassin, because he—a churl—a despised peasant—had dared lift his hand against one of their own privileged order. All eyes were fixed in earnest attention on the nephew of the Lord Fitzwalter. The young knight looked pale and haggard, as his uncle had described him, but was attired with much care, and spoke with calm though melancholy self-possession. He was, he said, on the previous night, returning from Oxford to his usual dwelling-place, attended only by one follower, when, as they passed the thick woods bordering the road, about a mile or more beyond the town, a shrill and startling cry burst on their ears. It was not repeated, but he plunged instantly into the thicket, followed by his attendant, and hurrying towards the place from whence the call for help had proceeded, perceived a knight lying on the ground ; beside him kneeled the churl (whose body was even now in the Hall) employed in rifling the prostrate man. To spring from his horse, seize a thick staff which lay on the ground beside the robber, and deal him a blow, which (as it chanced) proved mortal, was the work of an instant only ; and then he discovered—his voice faltered as he continued—that the slain knight was his own sworn brother-at-arms, Sir Edward of Leighton. He was apparently quite dead, having been stabbed in the back by a large whittle or knife (which, blood-stained as it was, was then produced). He (Sir Edmund) had immediately dispatched the man-at-arms to the city to call on the watch (for the gates were closed) for instant aid to remove the unfor-

tunate knight to the nearest shelter. He had himself remained with his dead friend till the party from the town arrived.

Here the knight paused. A low murmur passed amongst the knightly listeners, and the mayor, who had a profound reverence for the Baron Fitzwalter, as Standard-bearer to the City of London, and also as one of the leaders of the powerful body of the Barons, was profuse in his commendations of the young Fitzwalter's courage and devotion to his friend ; professing in great sincerity, ' that he did not believe, for his own son's sake, that *he* (the mayor) could have resolved on tarrying in the woods alone at such an hour and in such company.' Fitzwalter listened with a haughty impatience to the good magistrate's praises, and then, with a slight bow, drew back, permitting his follower's evidence to be next taken.

Dickon came boldly forward, and looked round the Hall with a scowl of such mingled defiance and irresolution, that, in despite of the unusual cleanliness and propriety of his attire, the spectators were very unfavourably impressed by his appearance, and more than one of the worthy citizens thought it must have required more courage to ride alone at night with such a companion, than to tarry in a wood without his company. His account of the sad event was in exact accordance with Sir Edmund's ; and the attendants of Sir Edward Pauncefort were then summoned to declare at what hour their young master had left his lodging in the town, and how accompanied. All declared their ignorance of his movements—after having seen him return on horseback with his father, Sir Grimbald, from a visit to the Baron—except a very young esquire, who remembered delivering a billet to him, brought by a peasant about an hour before his return. After reading it, his lord had walked forth alone, declining his attendance. He also recol-

lected that Sir Edward had put the scroll into the bosom of his vest. It was not, however, to be found, search being made for it, on the body. It had probably dropped from his garment in the death struggle, and a constable and some attendants were immediately dispatched to the spot to seek for it, as it had probably been the means employed to lure the knight into the power of the assassin.

In the interim, inquiries were made as to the name and occupation of the murderer. Several of the visitors to the obscure hostel where he had been last seen, recognized the body, and in consequence of their statement, Alice, the servant girl, was summoned before the magistry. Sobbing bitterly, and, hiding her face in her apron, she was almost dragged forward, to answer the coroner's interrogatories.

'What knew you, damsel, of this most foul murderer?' he asked.

'He was my old mistress's son, so please your worship,' sobbed the girl, removing the apron, and looking timidly round.

'And who is thy old mistress, simple wench?'

'Farmer Hartly's good wife, a very thrifty and honest housewife, your worship. Alack the day! what will become of her when she hears that Hugh hath come by such an evil chance?'

'A hopeful son she hath had, on mine honour,' rejoined the coroner. 'Was the ruffian at the hostel where you dwell, lately?'

'Only yesterday at noon, your worship: he came up to buy spices and other dainties for the sheep-shearing.'

'And took to fleecing travellers in the meanwhile, it would appear. A dangerous amusement, as he hath found to his cost. When did he leave the hostelry?'

'Soon after supper; but he meant to return and sleep, he told me, and journey homewards on the morrow. Alack! the

next time I saw him was as a blood-stained corse, carried into the town amidst the groans and hisses of the people.'

The girl again sobbed bitterly, as she thought of the fate of one who had been an indulgent friend to her in other times.

'You do ill, maiden,' said one of the aldermen, 'to bewail this cruel and evil-minded ruffian, who left you, doubtless, with the bloodthirsty purpose of murdering and robbing a gallant gentleman for the sake of feasting riotously on the spoils he might thus attain.'

'Alas! your good worship,' answered the damsel, 'he had surely no such purpose. He left the hostel that he might get a cunning man to tell him his fortune. I begged and prayed of him not to go,' she added, with a fresh burst of sobs; 'but he would not heed me, and all this evil hath come of it; for if he really did kill the knight——'

'If!' interrupted the mayor, in a tone of angry astonishment; 'darest thou doubt the word of the worshipful knight, the nephew of my Lord Fitzwalter? Rein thy tongue, mistress, or thou must receive some wholesome chastisement, to teach thee reverence for the nobility. It is plain enough the miscreant went to seek his fortune, and verily he hath found his deserts, thanks to the ready courage of Sir Edmund Fitzwalter. I fear me, thou art not too honest thyself.'

With this reproof the weeping kitchen-maid was dismissed. Dickon, on her entrance, had quitted the hall, anxious probably to prevent the possibility of her recognizing him as the companion of her unlucky master, and Fitzwalter had listened with breathless attention to her words, although he had little fear of any credit being given to her assertions should they tend to contradict his statement. Nevertheless, it was a relief to him when the girl was removed.



The party sent in search of the mysterious billet returned, after having explored the wood fruitlessly. The scroll was not found, but they had discovered, at some distance from the spot where the bodies had lain, a large pool of blood, a winding trace of which could be perceived in the grass till it reached the same scene of death. This discovery created some surprise, but admitted of no plausible explanation, unless, as one of the city councillors suggested, the churl had slain his noble victim there, and afterwards dragged him through the bushes to the place where Fitzwalter found them—a very useless and inexplicable action, however, which the shrewder part of the audience deemed unlikely and improbable, but were forced to adopt, for want of a better conclusion.

The inquest terminated in a verdict of wilful murder against the slain Hugh, and his body was condemned to be hung in chains on or near the scene of his crime, as a warning to all evil-minded and bloodthirsty persons.

A few days afterwards the body of the unfortunate Edward Pauncefort was borne in solemn state to the home of his fathers, to slumber amidst the noble dead of Leighton till the day when the earth shall no longer cover her slain. A train of noble and knightly friends of his house accompanied the sad procession, amongst whom was his patron, the Baron Fitzwalter. Sir Edmund declined being one of the party, on the plea of being seriously indisposed. The pale cheek, nervous tremor, and quivering lip, with which he had listened to the Knight of Leighton's earnest thanks for his loving friendship to the dead, confirmed the truth of his assertion, and the tidings, afterwards communicated by his uncle to the sorrowing inmates of the Hall, that the young gallant's extreme sensibility and deep grief had laid him on a bed of fever and delirium for

many days, won for him a still deeper interest in the hearts of the bereaved family.

We will not pause to describe—for all description would fail to portray it—the anguish of the wretched mother, the deep sorrow of Constance de Lingard, when the fatal tidings reached the Hall. It was on the day which should have witnessed his nuptials, that the funeral procession of Edward Pauncefort passed through the village, followed by the mourning vassals who had hoped to find in him a lord as beneficent and noble as his father. All had loved—all sorrowed for him. Even a stranger to the dead could not have gazed unmoved upon the countenance of the old knight, for anguish (which his manly pride concealed) had left deep traces on his brow. Pale, haggard, careworn, his haughty crest was bowed by the extremity of his grief; the blithe smile that was wont to light his frank features had fled for ever, so witheringly had sorrow fallen upon his spirit. For he, whose corse they bore back to its ancestral resting-place, had been the pride of his existence, the hope of his ancient house. His own character had sympathized with Edward's; he was less able to appreciate the loftier gifts and quiet gentle nature of the youth who rode beside him—his *new* heir.

Still unprofessed, the destined soldier of the Red Cross had, at his father's command, renounced his noviciate, for his brother's untimely fate had made him the heir of an earthly heritage; but it was with deep reluctance that Gerald had obeyed, and many a sorrowful regret for the brethren and the destiny which he had been compelled to abandon (that he might not add to his father's bereavement) mingled with the painful emotion with which he gazed on Edward's bier.

And now they approached the church, and, chanting their

holy litany, the sable-stoled priests came forth to meet the dead and the living. And solemnly the dust which had once been hallowed by the presence of a living spirit was consigned to its kindred earth, with many a natural and consoling prayer to the Father of spirits, that He would assoil and save, guide and keep, the freed soul, in its new and untried state of existence. For in that ancient Church, man's loving care for his fellow ceases not with the breath of life, but follows him beyond the grave with tender and earnest supplication. And if in truth those prayers are useless to the departed, at least they are a holy consolation for the living.

In her chamber, leaning on the bosom of the widowed betrothed, the Lady Pauncefort answered every tone of the passing-bell (which began its sad and yet soothing lament as soon as the procession entered the village) with deep, heart-breaking sobs. She had hoped that very day to have listened to the merry music of his marriage bells; and now, where was he? In the dim chambers of the dead! And a thousand busy memories came like mocking fiends to torment her, picturing vividly to her mind's eye her boy in the grace and beauty of infancy, leaning upon her knees, and looking, with sweet trustfulness in his loving eyes, up in her face. His young voice, his laugh, echoed again in her ear, and ever, as imagination heard it, came the deep tone of the passing-bell to tell her it was hushed for ever! Who *can* portray such anguish? 'Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul,' may be said to all such mourners, even as it was to that most Blessed and most suffering Mother who stood beneath the Cross.

But when their dead was buried, the father and brother returned to the Hall, and making a strong effort to repress their own grief, sought, and not vainly, to soothe the bereaved lady.

She felt, as she gazed on her younger son's soft blue eyes and listened to his voice, that earth had yet a blessing for her, and murmuring, 'I thank thee, O blessed Mary, that I am still a mother,' laid her head on his shoulder, and shed tears that were not altogether of pain.

Time—the comforter—performed his usual merciful office, and gradually soothed the sorrow of the afflicted inmates of the Hall. The old knight resumed his usual occupations, though manifestly with but little interest in them; the lady sought comfort in many an act of prayerful faith for the spirit of the departed, which were shared by Constance, who possessed a peculiar gift of consoling and soothing, which made her presence in the Hall like that of a sunbeam on a gloomy sky. Gerald was delighted with her matured beauty and gracefulness, and found a charm in her society, which made the necessity of his leaving Leighton, after a residence of two or three months, more painful than it otherwise would have been. For he was obliged to return to London to receive the order of knighthood and to present himself at the Court of his Sovereign. And yet he loved her only as a brother, and interpreted the emotion she evinced when he bade her farewell but as a proof of her sisterly affection for him. The lady unwillingly parted from her son, but was consoled by his promise of a speedy return, as Constance was, by the real reluctance he showed to forego, even for a brief space, their renewed interchange of thought and feeling. Often, when they were again separated, the delicate beauty of her fair face haunted his slumbers, but it was as that of some pure and pitying angel. He would have deemed it little short of sacrilege to have cherished a warmer feeling than admiration and almost adoring reverence for the betrothed bride of him who

now rested in the grave. Alas! he knew not that the lonely maiden's thoughts were ever with him, unrestrained by the harrowing fears and conscientious reproaches which had so long tortured her gentle spirit; that she half reproached herself for the involuntary feeling of happiness in her recovered freedom, which seemed a cruelty and an insult to the dead. If he had but guessed at her feelings, how different might their fates have been!



## CHAPTER VIII.

### A STREET ADVENTURE.

In mine eye she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked upon.

*Much Ado about Nothing.*

AN evening of revelry in Henry III.'s royal palace of Westminster was ended. The lamps were waxing dim, the last echoes of departing footsteps were dying away, and yet one solitary guest lingered in the deserted hall, gazing on the door which had closed on the fair party of Queen Eleanor's ladies. The loiterer was the former novice of the Temple, now *Sir Gerald Pauncefort*, who had that evening, for the first time since his admission to the order of knighthood, mingled in the revels of the Court. He was roused from the deep reverie into which he had fallen by a heavy hand falling on his shoulder,

and looking round with a start and heightened colour, he met the laughing eyes of a newly-made, but already dearly-tendered friend, Sir Guy de Ville.

‘Dost thou sleep standing, Pauncefort?’ he asked, banteringly; ‘or art thou spell-bound by the charms of this empty chamber and the delightful odours of dying lamps? Dost thou remember that we have a long ride before us, ere we can seek repose, of which, in very truth, I have great need?’

‘I am at your command, Guy,’ replied the young knight, ‘being to the full as weary as yourself.’

‘What! weary of standing or sitting still? for not a single measure have you trodden to-night.’

‘My spirits are weary, I would say,’ replied Gerald: ‘there was much excitement for one so unused to such a scene as myself, in the mere gazing on it.’

‘’T is a bitter night,’ observed De Ville, shivering, as they issued forth into the open court; ‘I would our lodging were in Westminster, instead of London. And it is dark, moreover, in spite of yon twinkling stars. Have you torches, knaves? We shall need them in the streets of London.’

A ready affirmative was given to his question by the armed attendants who waited to escort them, and springing on horse-back, the young men rode at a rapid pace over the lonely and unsafe road between the then separated cities of London and Westminster. It was not till they had entered the streets of the former that they slackened their speed, and Pauncefort addressed his companion.

‘What is the name of the lady with whom Earl Richard danced to-night, De Ville?’ he asked abruptly.

‘A very pertinent question,’ said the knight, laughing. ‘Earl Richard hath danced with nearly all the fair and noble damsels

in the hall to-night. How am I to tell of which fair she you speak ?'

'Of the fairest of them all ! The maiden with the dark eyes and raven tresses, who looked and moved like a queen !'

'With dark eyes and hair ?' said De Ville, musingly, 'and with a stately gait ? Did you condescend to note the colour of your divinity's robe ?'

'It was violet, broidered with pearls, after a more graceful fashion than those of the other maidens, and she left the hall with the Queen.'

'You can mean no other than Cicely Fitzwalter, the Baron of Baynard Castle's daughter, Gerald. She is beautiful and stately enough to excuse your raving of her ; but beware of loving her. She is so proud and cold that a man might as well woo the bright planet yonder, and hope to win it, as that damsel.'

'A Fitzwalter, sayst thou, De Ville ? She must then have been the companion of my poor Edward's boyhood ; the damsel of whom I have often heard him speak. It is strange he never said that she was so singularly beautiful !'

'He was almost daily in the habit of seeing her,' replied his friend ; 'and it is marvellous how soon the eye becomes accustomed to beauty or homeliness, and how little it then heeds either.'

'Is her father, the Baron, in London now ?'

'Yes, but he is seldom at Court. The King rather fears than loves him.'

'I must wait on him to-morrow,' said Gerald, thoughtfully. 'He was a second parent to Edward. I knew not that he had returned to Baynard's Castle.'

'He hath been there, now, some days.'

'And his nephew, Sir Edmund ?'

'Is still at his old tower in Oxfordshire. It pleases his wayward vanity to appear still a mourner for his friend; probably that he may gain the admiration of the Queen's beauties for his constancy and sensibility.'

'And wherefore do you doubt the sincerity of his regret, De Ville? You are not wont to judge ungenerously of your fellows.'

'Because they say he is not, as he pretends to be, a solitary mourner, but has with him a—— Hallo, my masters! what have we here?'

He reined in his steed as he uttered this sudden exclamation, and Pauncefort observed two men, muffled in horsemen's cloaks, bending over a person who lay, apparently insensible, immediately in their path.

'What hath chanced?' repeated De Ville.

'Nothing,' answered one of the strangers, sullenly; 'my wife here is tired, and has fainted. She will be better anon.'

Low deep groans from the prostrate female contradicted the assertion, and the young men commanded one of their attendants to alight and assist the sufferer. The men appeared disposed to resent this interference, but a glance at the well-armed followers of the young knights showed the impossibility of resisting their will, and they allowed De Ville's servant to assist them in raising the sufferer.

'What ails the woman?' asked Pauncefort, bending from his steed, with humane interest.

'The poor creature has an ugly wound in her forehead, Sir Knight,' replied the man; 'it looks like a blow.'

The knights exchanged glances of suspicion.

'She needs the aid of the leech, then,' said Sir Gerald, 'which happily is near at hand. Raise her tenderly on thine own steed, good fellow, and we will bear her to the monastery in the next



street. Friar John will gladly afford her the aid of his wondrous skill.'

'Easier said than done, Sir Traveller,' exclaimed the man who had first spoken, snatching the unhappy female from the servant's arm; 'I am not going to see my wife borne away from me by I wot not whom, without even saying by your leave or with your leave. I will thank you to pass on, and mind your own business.'

'Nay, you shall go with us also, sirrah!' exclaimed De Ville; 'and to-morrow this affair shall be inquired into before the magistrates. I fear me the woman hath met with foul play at your hands. Seize these men,' he added to his already dismounted followers, 'and bear them with us also.'

The ruffian who had before answered them muttered a deep oath, and laid his disengaged hand on his dagger; but perceiving the fruitlessness of resistance, as the men approached to do their lord's bidding, he suddenly threw his now insensible burden before them, and, followed by his comrade, darted down one of the dark side passages, where pursuit was, in consequence of the darkness, dangerous, if not impossible.

De Ville, after a momentary hesitation, desired his men to mount and bear the female to the shelter of the Franciscan monastery. She gave no signs of returning life till they gained the great portal of the establishment, when a deep groan alone announced that it was not a corpse which they committed to the benevolent care of Friar John.

It was late the next day ere the friends met, to discuss the adventure of the past night. De Ville was about to return to his paternal home, and Pauncefort resolved to visit the Lord of Baynard's Castle, ere he also returned to share the approaching festivities of Christmas with his family. The friends parted

with promises of a speedy reunion, and Gerald directed his course to the Hospitium of the Franciscans, to inquire after the rescued sufferer they had left there.

Friar John received him with a smile of friendly greeting.

‘Our patient is better and now sleeps, my son,’ he said, in answer to his inquiries: ‘under Heaven I believe she owes you her life. A blow on her head is the chief injury she has sustained, and it is attended with much feverish suffering. She has not yet been sufficiently sensible to tell who she is, nor how she came in such peril.’

‘The ruffian from whom we rescued her called her his wife,’ said Gerald.

‘She wears a marriage ring,’ replied the friar, ‘but her dress is of richer materials than would appear befitting a churl’s wife, and she is—even in pain and suffering—strikingly beautiful.’

‘I did not credit the rogue’s assertion, nor do I now. Perchance she is the dame of some wealthy citizen: our city fair ones emulate the Court ladies in finery.’

‘It may be so,’ answered the Franciscan. ‘She will be able, I trust, in a few days, to explain the singular position in which she was found. When do you return to Leighton?’

‘In a few days, father; but I shall see you again before I leave. I am now on my road to Baynard’s Castle, to visit the good Baron Fitzwalter.’

‘Farewell, then, my dear son and pupil,’ said the Franciscan. ‘I will not detain you, but will return to the sick woman’s chamber, and see if she be yet awake. Let me see you again soon.’

Pauncefort gave the desired promise and departed, and the monk returned to the chamber of his sleeping patient. An old nurse, who watched beside her, rose on his entrance, and in-

formed him that the sufferer was awake, and appeared sensible. The benevolent friar drew near the pallet on which the stranger lay: her eyes were still closed. She raised her feeble lids as he took her hand, and looked earnestly on him.

'Good father,' she murmured, 'do I owe to you my wretched life?'

'No, daughter,' said the priest, gently; 'I am but your leech. He who was Heaven's instrument in rescuing you from death is called Sir Gerald Pauncefort of Leighton.'

The young woman uttered a deep groan, and hid her face in her hands.

'The knight was here but now,' he continued, 'and will return, perchance, to-morrow. He is desirous of knowing whom he has rescued, and of restoring you to your friends. Do they dwell in this city?'

'No, no! I have no friend in this great town,' she said, with a slight shudder; 'I have no friends.' She paused, and her slight form trembled with suppressed emotion. 'Father,' she continued, 'I will tell you all my wretched history when I am able; I have not strength now.'

'I do not wish you to exert yourself at present, my daughter,' said the monk, kindly. 'I will send you a soothing medicine, and see you again to-morrow.'

'Stay, father,' she exclaimed with a sudden effort, as he was about to withdraw; 'I would crave a boon of you. Will you read this scroll to me?' She drew from her bosom as she spoke an open billet, and held it towards him. The priest took it, and glanced hastily over it. Amazement was depicted on his features as he did so.

'Whence got you this writing, daughter?' he asked.

No matter,' was the answer; 'read it to me, I implore you!'

Moved by her impetuosity and imploring accents, the monk complied. The billet ran thus :

‘A friend would speak with Sir Edward Pauncefort *immediately* and *alone*, beneath the great oak in the woods, without the city. Sir Edward is required to come unattended, if he would learn the fate of his unhappy vassal—A. P——.’

The damsel drew in her breath, and with clasped hands and fixed glassy eyes gazed on the monk as he read ; and when he ceased—uttering a sharp cry, as if smitten with sudden anguish—she fell back, pale and insensible, as when first brought to the Hospitium of St. Francis.

4



## CHAPTER IX.

CICELY.

Is't possible, that but seeing you should love him ?

SHAKSPEARE.

**I**N an apartment of the strong and stately fortress in which dwelt the hereditary Standard-bearer of the great City of London, sat his fair and only daughter, with her favourite and confidential attendant, busied at her tapestry-frame. It was not surprising that beauty so dazzling as that possessed by Cicely Fitzwalter should have won the fancy of the student of

the Temple, although it differed from the visions of female loveliness that had at times filled his imagination. The smooth, glossy, raven tresses, the eyes of liquid light, the snowy, yet glowing complexion, the features that might have served as a model for a Grecian sculptor, and the majestic youthful form, clad in the rich and well-chosen splendour of attire which befitted her noble birth, might well excuse the enthusiasm she inspired in all who beheld her. She was, as we have said, busied in the usual employment of her sex, but appeared to take little interest in her task, pausing continually to talk to a golden-haired damsel who kneeled beside her, busied in sorting shades of bright-coloured worsted.

'Alack! sweet madam,' said the favoured attendant, 'I marvel that your ladyship should have noticed this young knight, when so many grand gentlemen, nay, even his Grace's own brothers (by his mother's side) were contending for your smiles.'

'If he had danced, talked, and laughed, as others did, I had not perchance observed him,' said the lady; 'but he stood nearly in the same spot all the evening, and ever, when I looked towards him, I met his fixed and earnest gaze. It was this strange stillness that roused my curiosity.'

'Was he well-favoured, lady?' asked the damsel, with a sly smile.

'True English, judging from his hair, eyes, and complexion, Marian, and if not quite what people call well-favoured, at least striking in appearance. Methought the expression of his face was familiar to me, but I believe it was only the resemblance that might be traced between it and the picture of the angel of Our Lady's annunciation in the Abbey.'

'Like nothing less than an angel!' thought Marian. 'Our

Lady! the stranger stood still to some purpose. I will try and find out who he is, lady,' she said aloud, 'from some of the pages. I can easily make them understand whom I mean—the knight who is like the angel Gabriel!'

The lady coloured deeply and bent over her frame for a moment. It was only for a moment. Her eyes were the next instant fixed on her attendant with an earnest and penetrating gaze, but the expression of perfect simplicity which Marian's pretty features wore puzzled her.

'You will make such inquiries as you choose *in your own name*; but remember, mistress, the name of the Lord Fitzwalter's daughter must not be uttered to pages and grooms,' she said, haughtily.

'Of course, madam,' said the maiden; 'trust to me for acting with all proper discretion. I have many ways of finding out that which I care not openly to ask.'

'Thou art shrewd-witted enough, and I believe faithful,' said the lady. 'I shall ride with my lord the Baron to-day, and we may, perhaps, meet the unknown. Is my new quintise finished?'

'It is, madam, and is of a right comely fashion. Helène, the Provençal sempstress of the Countess de la Marche, gave Margaret the pattern for it.'

'Very well,' said the lady, languidly; 'bid her get my riding gear, girl, and bring it hither. The Baron bears with no feminine delays, thou knowest, and it must be near the hour he fixed for our setting forth.'

The girl obeyed, and the Lady Cicely, leaning her head against the high back of the elaborately carved chair on which she sat, closed her brilliant eyes, and resigned herself, during her attendant's absence, to meditations which, from the half-smile that lingered on her full red lip, were probably of a pleasing

nature. She was roused from them by the girl's sudden return, who entered the chamber in breathless haste.

'Madam, dear lady!' she exclaimed, as Cicely looked in some surprise on her eager face, 'he is below—the young knight—with my lord the Baron. I am sure it can be none other. As I was passing the corridor leading to my lord's private apartments, who should cross before me, ushered by Geoffrey, but a stranger knight, with fair hair, and such eyes and such a presence! Thinks I, yonder is the unknown angel—I crave your pardon, madam—I mean visitor of the palace; but I am so flurried, I scarcely know what I say.'

'There is no cause for your haste or flurry, as you call it,' replied her lady, coldly; 'if you had had to announce some wonderful tidings, you could not have made a greater stir about it. A simple matter of curiosity demands not so much hurry. But it is as well you are come back, as I am undecided about riding now, and would first see my lord and father, and know his wishes ere I venture out in this shrewd frost. You may tarry here till my return.'

She left the chamber with her usual composed and stately demeanour, but the pretty waiting damsel looked after her with a smile full of arch meaning.

'So my fair mistress will use her own eyes to know whether my guess be a true one! Curiosity? marry, when was she wont to feel so vulgar a passion, as she ever calls it? She, who looks on all, high or low, rich or poor, prince or peasant, with the same unmoved, proud indifference, taking no more interest in them or their affairs than if they were not of the same kind; and now for a whole morning to talk and think about a stranger, and seek to know his name! If she be not in love like any other mortal maiden—though I never deemed she could be

before—may I never wed Roger Gifford. And time she was, too! Three and twenty years old last St. John's Day, and not wedded yet! Ah, well! every one's time comes at last.' And after this sage reflection Marian busied herself with her former task.

As the Lady Cicely entered her father's apartment, and perceived that her maiden's random guess was correct, and that the object of her recent thoughts was really before her, an involuntary emotion prompted her immediately to retire; but the old Baron had seen her, and called loudly on her to stay.

'Thou art well come, Cicely,' he added, taking her hand and drawing her proudly forward; 'I was about to bring this young gentleman to present to thee. Give him a fair greeting, girl. He is Sir Gerald of Leighton, the son of my old friend and ally, and brother of the brave boy who was thy playfellow.'

The maiden had recovered her self-possession while the Baron spoke, and returned the somewhat confused obeisance of the young knight with the dignity of a princess.

'You are most welcome to Baynard's Castle for your father's sake, as well as for that of your regretted brother, Sir Knight,' she said. 'I trust all at Leighton are well?'

'Well, madam, I thank you, when I last heard of them. My father is recovering, though slowly, from the heavy affliction it hath pleased Heaven to send him.'

'Are you not, then, recently from Leighton?'

'No, lady, but I purpose soon returning thither; and I would not leave London without first paying my devoirs to my poor Edward's good lord and patron.'

'A passing call only, Cicely!' cried the old noble; 'heard you ever such a folly? As if I would permit my old comrade's son to treat me with such formal courtesy. No, no, Sir Gerald,



you must e'en make up your mind to tarry at Baynard's Castle till Christmas—we may not keep you longer from your home, I know—and try how well my Cicely can play the hostess. What, Cicely ! tell him he shall not go, girl.'

It needed but little entreaty from the silver tones of the fair creature who had so instantly won on his fancy, to induce the young knight to remain beneath the same roof with her, to defer his departure for Leighton, and to forget his promise of again calling at the Franciscan monastery.

He remained at Baynard's Castle till days grew into weeks. It would be tedious to tell how in the daily intercourse established between them the knight and the lady's admiration of each other ripened into affection. Violent, impetuous, haughty, and capricious, the very reverse of the standard of female perfection which his imagination loved to picture, Cicely Fitzwalter nevertheless gained the most despotic influence over the mind of Pauncefort. His vanity—what man was ever unassailable on that point ?—was gratified by the distinction made in his favour by one hitherto so cold and self-engrossed ; and his life, which from the time he first quitted Leighton had been secluded and studious, appeared to gain a new and delightful interest in the charm of female society. Her ready sympathy, her undisguised interest in his conversation, induced the usually reserved young man to make her the confidante of his thoughts, the councillor of his actions, before he had yet ventured to tell her that he loved her.

She was his partner in the dance ; they sat together at the banquet ; rode together ; and often when she worked beside her father in the stormy afternoons of the wintry season, the knight beguiled the time of its tedium for the old baron by reciting many a minstrel's tale with the skill and grace of an

experienced *trouveur*, and the varied powers of his cultivated intellect delighted the old noble, whilst they fascinated the vivid and restless imagination of his child. Her fancy clothed the happy and daring adventurer or the devoted and generous hero of whom he told such wondrous legends in the narrator's own form, and she endowed him with all the various characteristics of the creatures of his imagination; while he, as he spoke, caught new inspiration from the varying expressions which his art could bring on the glorious beauty of her countenance. He was not, Othello-like, the hero of his own story, yet he felt that every tear, or blush, or smile his tale awakened, was given to himself.

No marvel that Leighton was forgotten, Constance seldom remembered, and that the epistles dictated by his father, or voluntarily written by Father Dennis, remained unheeded.

His residence beneath the roof of Fitzwalter threw him frequently into the society of William of Salisbury, one of the most distinguished warriors of the age; of the Earl of Cornwall, and of many a baron whose name was destined to gain a painful celebrity afterwards in the civil wars between the De Montfort faction and the royal party; but the engrossing sentiment which occupied him prevented his interchanging more than passing courtesies with any of these new companions. The Baron Fitzwalter, accustomed to see his beautiful daughter the object of universal homage, regarded the devotion of his guest to the young lady as a thing of course. It never would have occurred to him that the son of a mere country knight, however wealthy, could aspire to *her* favour, who had hitherto disdained the love of half the English chivalry. Yet that love was given—in this instance almost unsought; and it was one great proof of the influence the maiden exercised over her lover,

that he consented at her request to conceal their mutual affection from his confiding host. Their dream of happiness was interrupted, however, by the approach of Christmas, which obliged Gerald to return to his home for a time, in compliance with the wishes of his parents.

'Return to us as speedily as you can, Gerald,' said the Baron Fitzwalter, as, the day before Christmas Eve, the young knight sought him to say farewell. 'Return soon: stirring times are coming, boy. King Louis of France, whom men well style "the Saint," hath vowed another crusade; and my good Lord of Salisbury, Sir Walter de Lucy, and myself, mean to buckle on our armour again and unite the war-cry of St. George with that of Montjoie St. Denis. I would fain see you amongst my good lances.'

'And right joyfully will I accompany you, my lord,' answered the young man, eagerly; 'it would be sin and shame if one reared to the service of the Temple should be wanting at such a time to the army of the Cross.'

'Your father will gladly hear of such an opportunity of adding new honour to his name,' continued the Baron, 'though, perchance, he may not choose to take the Cross himself. Our poor Edward is most unfortunate in having been untimely cut off before this gallant enterprise.'

'Does the King purpose joining his royal brother of France?' asked Gerald.

'No, by St. George! his Grace looks but coldly on the proposal, and will make no promise to join us. On the contrary, he will not permit the Prince Richard to go with us. It is scarce possible to believe that our present liege is a Plantagenet.'

'He is Henry, "*the son of John*,"' replied the young knight, in an accent of regret; 'but the boy prince, Edward, will be a

worthy successor of Cœur de Lion if he live to succeed his father.'

'Heaven grant it!' said the old noble.

'And the Lady Cicely?' asked the knight, hesitatingly; 'doth she accompany you, my good lord?'

'Ay, in attendance on the fair Queen Marguerite of France. I have but just now told her of my plan, and you will find her, doubtless, in high spirits at the thought of so holy and interesting a pilgrimage. And now go bid her adieu; she is in her bower with her maidens, and will be displeased if you depart without saying farewell.'

The young man readily obeyed, and found Cicely (who was in expectation of his visit) alone, excepting the presence of her confidante Marian. She rose hastily, and advanced to meet him with eyes sparkling with pleasure, and as he pressed her extended hands to his lips, she said, eagerly,

'I have news for you, Pauncefort; my lord and father hath promised to take the Cross, and thus you and I may visit the holy places of the earth together.'

'We will, if Heaven permit, my Cicely,' said her lover. 'On the plains of Palestine I may hope to win such fame from the Saracen as shall make me worthy of your love.'

'Such as may make it possible to win my father's consent to our union, I trust,' she said. 'The heroes of the first crusade won kingdoms for themselves in the East, and I see not why you may not hope to equal them.'

'The saints grant it!' ejaculated the knight. 'I have a more powerful motive and a fairer inspiration for my valour than had ever knight or paladin. But, in truth, fair Cicely, my conscience reproaches me for the deception I am practising on my noble patron. I would win you openly, dearest.'

A slight frown was on the lady's brow, as she replied,

'I understand the reproof your words convey, Gerald, and acknowledge that it is just. It was unwise to love one whose suit I knew my father would scorn; still more unwise to acknowledge it.'

'Nay, Cicely, you misinterpret my words: I meant not anything so ungrateful. I, and I only, am to blame, if blame there be in this matter. But I hope yet to win you, with your father's glad consent. I would we sailed for Palestine to-morrow!'

'There is no chance of our leaving England till the summer,' said the lady. 'But remember, our watchwords are—Patience and Faith.'

'The former I will pray for, and the latter you cannot doubt,' he answered, smiling, 'How could I ever change, sweet lady?'

'As men often have and will,' she said. 'But beware that you never do—my vengeance for perfidy would be deep and fearful, as my love is passionate and strong.' She turned her dark and flashing eyes on him with an expression so sternly terrible as she spoke, that Pauncefort started involuntarily. A moment's silence followed, and then Cicely, with one of her most winning smiles, again spoke.

'I am fortunate,' she said, 'in escaping seclusion in a convent or the surveillance of some old and precise matron during my father's absence. I have been so long my own mistress that I should ill brook restraint; and travelling in distant and wild countries is more to my taste than the dull monotonous life we women lead in our own land.'

'I know not how I could have borne to think that mighty seas rolled between us,' said the knight: 'thank the saints! that trial is to be spared me. It is a heavy one to bid you farewell for a few weeks only, Cicely, as I must now do.'

‘Do you go to-day?’ she asked with some surprise. ‘I thought you did not purpose leaving London till to-morrow.’

‘I did not at first, but it is long since I have seen a valued friend to whom I am greatly indebted—a friar of the order of St. Francis—and I would spend a few hours with him before my departure. I have forgotten every one of late, in your sweet society, lady.’

‘Farewell then, Gerald, and be faithful.’

‘Can you doubt me?’ he asked.

‘Nay, I know not,’ she said, jestingly; ‘there dwells a fair damsel at Leighton.’

‘The widowed betrothed of my brother,’ he said, gravely and sadly: ‘dear to me as a loved and honoured sister.’

‘Look not so solemn, Gerald; I will not name her lightly again if it pain you to hear of her.’ And she held out her hand: he took it; and, after a few brief words of affection and farewell, they parted. The knight, leaving Baynard’s Castle with a heavy heart, took his sad and silent way through the streets of London to the Franciscan monastery.

Friar John received him with his usual cordial greeting, but Gerald remarked that he looked graver than usual, and that there was a slight accent of reproach in his tones, as he remarked,

‘It is long since I have seen you, my son—some five weeks at least.’

‘My time has been much occupied, father,’ said Pauncefort, colouring deeply; ‘your good-nature and indulgence must pardon me if I——’

‘Nay,’ interrupted the priest, gently, ‘make no excuses, dear son. I have no right to reprove you, nor would I that any motive save your own free will should bring you to my cell.’

Vowed to the total renunciation of earth, I am justly punished if, when I set my heart upon a fellow-man's friendship, it should fail me.'

'I have been negligent—ungrateful, father!' exclaimed the young man, impetuously: 'your words are bitter reproaches; but I will give you no future cause to doubt my friendship. I have intended every day to come to you, but——' He hesitated.

'You are come at last,' said Friar John, with a smile that lighted up his pale features. 'It is sufficient, and you are ever welcome. Let there be no apologies between us.'

'They shall not be needed again,' replied the knight. 'But you look graver than is your wont, father. Hath aught chanced to grieve you?'

'Ay, my good son, and you are in a manner connected with the subject of my painful thoughts. Do you remember the wounded female you brought hither five weeks since?'

'I do. She is now, I hope, well, and in safety?'

'Alas! I know not for the latter. Yesterday, whilst all the sisterhood of the adjoining convent in which I had placed her were at vesper service, she fled from its shelter, and is gone I know not whither.'

'Fled! and in last night's tempest, father? Wherefore, I beseech you? What and who was she?'

'I know not,' replied the priest; and he proceeded to relate the circumstance of her giving him the scroll, and the effect which the hearing it read had produced on her.

'She continued,' he added, 'in great danger for many days. I sent for you, deeming it important that you should see her, and seek to discover the writer of this most mysterious scroll. But you had left your lodging, and I could obtain no trace of

your abode. I waited, therefore, in the daily expectation of seeing you, and detained my patient till you should come; her health affording a plea for keeping her with her kind nurses the nuns. She was of wild and unsettled intellect, they told me. Sometimes she would boast of being the wife of a knight, and, holding up her wasted hand, show the plain gold circle it bore in evidence of her truth. At other moments she would talk to herself, as if soothing some unseen and suffering person, and then start with a sudden horror. But she ever refused steadily to answer any queries as to where she found the scroll, or who had given it to her; nor would she reveal her name or family. After receiving your message yester-eve I saw her, and informing her of your intended visit of to-day, urged her, by the gratitude she owed you, to reveal to you the mystery of the scroll which she so obstinately concealed from myself. She was much agitated; talked wildly and incoherently; but at length promised compliance with my desire when she saw you. This morning she is nowhere to be found.'

'Tis, in truth, a most singular circumstance,' exclaimed Pauncefort. 'May I pray you to let me see the scroll of which you speak?'

The monk produced it, and the knight read it with deep emotion.

'This,' he said, as he concluded his task, 'this must be the letter of which Edward's page spoke—the snare which led my gallant and unhappy brother into the power of his murderer. Whence came it? Who could have written it? I pray you, father, help me to read this dark riddle.'

'Know you aught of the damsel to whom the writing refers?' asked the priest.

'Ay; she was my own foster-sister, Alinor Perrot, and had



been lured from her home by a villain. So I learned when last at Leighton.'

'Your brother, then, possibly, in his researches for the lost maiden, incurred the enmity of some of the wild rangers of the forests, who may have been the allies and accomplices of her lover. There are some hedge-priests among them who could have indited and written the scroll for them, and doubtless—judging from her fear of meeting you, from her having possession of the paper, and from the cruel manner in which he who called himself her husband treated her—the woman who has fled must be Alinor Perrot herself. Her agony, and horror, and self-reproach may be accounted for, by finding that her name had been the lure employed to draw her generous young master to his death.'

'But, father, one of the most singular circumstances attending that foul deed was, that the murderer was proved to be the son of a yeoman of good repute till that time, who could have known nothing of our poor Alinor.'

'It is very strange,' said the priest, thoughtfully. 'Did some other hand than that of the dead churl remove the scroll from the slain man's bosom? Man is often the slave of appearances—deceived sometimes by his own senses. Perchance the unhappy rustic was bending over the slain knight with a humane instead of a guilty motive when the rash young friend of your brother slew him.'

'Who, then, do you deem guilty of his blood?' asked Pauncefort, almost sternly.

'Alas, my son! who can tell? No one, I fear me, but the damsel who hath fled,—perhaps to escape the pursuit of justice, if she were an accomplice—'

'No, no!' exclaimed Gerald, 'that cannot be, father. Poor

Alinor may be the victim of others' guilt, but I would stake my life on her own innocence. She loved my brother, as all the vassals of Leighton did, and was of too soft-hearted and kind a nature to have even dreamed of such a horror as secret murder.'

'The beginning of evil is as the letting out of water,' said the monk: 'who can tell where she, who deserted her parents' age for a life of guilt, might stop in her career of sin?'

'I have heard that she believed herself the wife of the unknown who took her from her home, and there was some fable in the village of his being a knight; but when the tale was repeated to me my mind was too much occupied with my late affliction to give it full attention. I will learn it more fully when I again see my mother.'

'Do so, my son,' said the priest; 'I am greatly deceived, or, when you discover the lover of Alinor Perrot, you will find the real assassin of your brother.'

'His blood shall not cry to me from the earth in vain,' said the young knight, with emotion. 'If his murderer be a knight, my sword shall deal justice on him, and if a peasant, he shall take the churl's place on the gallows-tree ere long. I will, however, have some certain clue to this strange mystery before I awake the sorrow of my good father, Sir Grimbald, by recalling the circumstances of his bereavement to his mind.'

'You will do well and wisely, my son,' answered the friar, 'and may Heaven assist your pious efforts as it shall judge best!'

'Amen!' said the knight. 'In its avenging justice and insulted majesty do I place my trust.'

## CHAPTER X.

## TOO LATE.

For here forlorn and lost I tread,  
With fainting steps and slow.

GOLDSMITH.

**I**T was Christmas Eve. The old Hall of Leighton was gay with its appropriate decorations of holly and mistletoe. A bright fire glowed upon the hearth and threw its cheerful but fitful light through the obscurity of the spacious hall, for a gloomy day was nearly lost in twilight. The servants were busily preparing the evening meal, and from a loophole in an upper chamber commanding a view of the road to the great entrance, the Lady Pauncefort watched for the return of her husband, who had gone forth to meet his son.

Beside her stood Constance de Lingard, still clad, like the lady, in mourning, which well became her fair complexion and graceful form. There was a soft light in her dark blue eyes, and a smile, half melancholy, half joyful, on her rosy lips, as she looked out on the darkening landscape, for him who lived in her thoughts. Both ladies were silent, for their hopes of speedy reunion with Gerald were mingled with painful remembrances of the beloved one who slept in the grave. It was the first time since *his* funeral that there had been an arrival at Leighton, save of some uncared-for and passing guest.

It is seldom that the anniversaries of festivals are seasons of unmixed rejoicing, after the expiration of early childhood. The bright faces 'whose smile lit up the hall,' pass one by one away. Loved voices, silent in death, leave a faint echo in the

soul, which at such times become again audible; and regret for the Past clouds the rejoicing Present. The Christmas circle of Leighton Manor had been first broken by the departure of Gerald—for Edward Pauncefort had always spent the Great Festival of the Church with his parents—and now, when the long-absent one returned to his vacant place beside the yule log, the severed chain of domestic love could never more be united upon earth; for one of its links was in that shadowy world for which we are taught to yearn, and which becomes familiar to our imagination only by the dispensation which severs those ties that bind us most strongly to mortality.

At length a party of horsemen was descried by the anxious watchers rapidly approaching, and, taking Constance's arm, the lady hastened to the hall to give her younger precious child a mother's greeting. Confused and trembling, Constance stood near in silence, till her former companion should have time to answer her murmured welcome. She did not raise her eyes to his face as she spoke, but Gerald felt that the little white hand he held was cold and tremulous, and he detained it in his, and spoke soothingly and tenderly to her. He believed her emotion was caused by the remembrance of his lost brother, and it awoke all the tender sympathy of his nature; for her fair face was, he thought, paler and sadder than ever, and, as he continued speaking in a low tone, the rebellious tears forced their way through the dark lashes, which sought vainly to restrain them. He drew her towards him, and as he kissed her cheek with brotherly fondness, whispered,

'There are many left to love you still, my gentle Constance.'

With a sudden and hasty movement she broke from him, and turning to the old knight, began to talk to him rapidly and with a flushed cheek.

Christmas Day dawned—a cold, bleak, cheerless morning, and once more the family of the Hall knelt in the village church in humble and thankful devotion. Constance listened with a quiet rapture, which checked her own sweet notes, to the deep voice again mingling in the solemn services of the day, and, as she listened, the intervening space of time which had separated them was forgotten, and Gerald was again, in her imagination, her daily companion and guide—the boy of seven years ago. After the morning service they walked together in a deserted gallery that had been the scene of many a childish sport, and talked over past days; and those remembrances, and the deep pity he felt for her, gave a tenderness to Gerald's looks and tones which might well have deceived one more versed in human nature than the simple-minded and affectionate Constance.

Amongst the worshippers in Leighton church that day, morning and evening, were Giles Perrot and his idiot son. The blithe yeoman was so changed that Sir Gerald scarcely recognized him: his brown locks were now silvered with the hue of age, and he bent, as if the sorrows that had bowed his spirit had affected his stalwart form. He had, indeed, been heavily afflicted. It is proverbial that misfortunes seldom visit us singly, and in his case the first grief of his daughter's loss had been speedily followed by a still heavier one—his wife had pined away from that day, and the snow now lay on the grave of her who had been the sharer of his weal and woe for many a weary year. The boy was little altered; his feeble intellect lived only in the present, and though at times he missed his mother's care and his sister's presence, he soon forgot them, and carolled as gaily, and smiled as vacantly and as gladly, as he was wont. Gerald exchanged a few kind words with the

farmer as they left the church, and promised him a visit on the morrow, and the Lady Pauncefort urged him to sup at the Hall; but he refused with grateful respect, and returned with a slow step to his desolate home, now more than usually sad and silent, for, unwilling to have any approach to revelry within its doors, and yet not wishing to condemn others to gloom and seclusion at such a time, he had suffered the farm servants to join the revellers at the village alehouse, and he and his son were the sole tenants, that evening, of the Beech Farm. Very gloomy it looked as they approached and entered it; for the thatch was covered with the thick snow, and the old trees shook the white mantle from their many branches, as they creaked and moaned before the howling blast. The fire was nearly out—a few red embers only lay upon the hearth. With a deep sigh the yeoman threw on it some fresh fuel, and then, casting himself on one of the settles near it, looked sadly round the darkened room. The boy knelt beside him, trying to revive the flame with his breath; and when it again burnt brightly he leant his head against his father's knee, and listened to the chirp of a cricket—who was merry even there—and to the pattering of the snow-drift against the casements.

'It is a dismal Christmas, father,' he said at length, in a low tone; 'I wish mother would come back again!'

'Your mother is in heaven, boy,' was the reply, in a tone so stern that it startled the listener; 'and it were a sinful and cruel wish to desire that she should return to this sad world.'

'I will not wish her back, then,' said Giles, in a hushed tone. 'I wonder if there be a Christmas Day in heaven?'

No answer was given to him, and he continued,

'Is Ally in heaven, too, father?'

The yeoman groaned deeply.

'I hope she is,' continued Giles, 'for it is piercing cold for travellers to-night. I will peep out of the door, and see if the stars be come out yet to light them. Are the stars cold, father, that they draw the clouds all over their bright faces, and will not look down on our Christmas night?' Without waiting for a reply, he walked to the door, opened it, and looked out into the dark space beyond, which was lighted only by the glitter of the snow-drift. As he did so, a faint low cry struck on his ears, and he drew back with a look of terror. 'Father,' he said, 'there is something lying beneath the beeches yonder. I can see a black heap on the snow.'

Perrot rose and came to his son's side, but could perceive nothing. 'It is but the shadow you see, Giles,' he said; 'come in from the cold.'

'And the cry, father?'

'A distant sound from the village. Shut the door, Giles.'

The idiot obeyed unwillingly. They resumed their former places, and the yeoman his silence, save when he bade the boy eat of the supper, which he tasted not himself.

It was late ere approaching footsteps and voices announced the return of the revellers, and the boy was roused from a deep slumber by their entrance. He heard the foremost who entered, and who bore a muffled figure, apparently asleep or insensible, in his arms, say,

'We have found a poor body perishing in the snow, master—if she be not dead, which I fear—and have brought her hither.'

'You did well, Roger,' said the yeoman; and rising, he took the wayfarer from his servant, and laying her softly down before the fire, removed the hood and cloak which covered her. Giles never forgot the cry the father then uttered, as he gazed on the yet fair features of his dead daughter!

## CHAPTER XI.

## ALINOR.

Bring me a father that so loved his child,  
 Whose joy of her is overwhelm'd like mine,  
 And bid him speak of patience.

SHAKSPEARE.

ON the morning following this domestic tragedy, the lady of Leighton and her adopted daughter sat, with their attendants, at work in their own apartment, and their labours were not the less cheerfully pursued because the lady's son leaned on the back of her chair, and amused them with stories of the distant world of London. He told them much of the magnificent hospitality of Baynard's Castle, of the King and great nobles, of Queen Eleanor's splendour and of the refinement of her Court, and of the rare promise of Prince Edward's youth. Once only he spoke of Cicely Fitzwalter, in reply to a question of his mother's regarding her, saying that she was very beautiful and much admired; and then—with the common reluctance ever felt by minds of his stamp to talk of the chief object of their thoughts—turned the discourse to other topics. Had Constance looked on him as he named her rival, she would probably have remarked his heightened colour; but she heard only his cold and indifferent tone as she bent over her tapestry-frame, and remained happily unconscious of his emotion. The moments flew rapidly away, and the maiden looked with regret on the ray of sunshine, which, piercing the narrow window, fell on the flower she wrought, and by promising a cessation of the bad weather which kept their companion



within doors, threatened to deprive them of his company. He had already said that he must join his father, when the door was hastily opened, and Sir Grimbald entered, looking vexed and agitated.

'Here is evil news again, dame,' he exclaimed, addressing his lady; 'fresh sorrow for poor Perrot! His pretty Alinor was found dead last night, beneath the old elms, in sight of his very door, and he heard her death-cry, but, mistaking it for a sound from the village, paid no heed to it.'

His auditors uttered an exclamation of horror, and Constance turned so pale, that the young knight involuntarily drew close beside her to offer her his support.

'Holy Virgin! how terrible,' said the Lady Pauncefort, shuddering; 'who found her, my dear lord?'

'The servants returning from the revels at the village ale-house. She was quite dead when they bore her into the farm, killed doubtless by cold, hunger, and fatigue. Her cry for help was heard by the poor idiot boy, but the father—as I have told you—paid no heed to it, and she lay for some hours on the snow before she was found.'

'Alas!' said the lady, 'our poor vassal! This stroke is surely more than man may endure. It is enough to madden him.'

'He hath not spoken since his recovery from the fit caused by the discovery,' said the knight, pacing the room in great emotion; 'but sits, they tell me, fixed and motionless, gazing on the face of the dead. I have sent Father Dennis down to him, and am going myself. Will you go with me, Gerald?'

His son instantly assented, and as they descended the stairs, asked anxiously if any trace had been discovered of the villain who had wrought so much evil.

'No, i' faith,' said the old knight, 'though we have sought

far and near for the knave. We were busied making inquiries on the subject at Oxford—as we had cause to suspect some one of our late guests had been the villain—when your brother’—his lip trembled as he spoke—‘was murdered. I confess I forgot Perrot’s loss in mine own affliction; but I do not believe our efforts to discover him would have been more successful *then* than they have been since. Would the damsel had lived long enough to tell her tale! The secret must now slumber in her grave till the Judgment.’

Gerald made no reply. His father’s words recalled and confirmed the friar’s suspicions that the churl had not been guilty of the crime imputed to him, but that his brother’s real murderer and the husband of Alinor Perrot were the same person; and he inwardly resolved never to rest till he had discovered him, and wreaked due vengeance on him for his crime. Alinor’s death was the more unfortunate, as it rendered the mystery nearly impenetrable; but the scroll was still in the safe keeping of Friar John, and he trusted that it might yet be the means of convicting the unknown assassin. Immersed in these reflections, he mounted the steed prepared for him, and silently accompanied the old knight to the farm.

The sun had been victorious over the dense clouds, and shone brightly out, as if in mockery of human sorrow; melting the snow on the thatched roof and on the naked boughs of the trees, so that the old elms let fall a shower of rainbow-coloured drops, like tears, on the spot where she—who had played beneath them many a time when a sportive child—had perished. The knights of Leighton looked at the spot with an involuntary shudder, and pushing on, were soon before the door of the farm. The boy came forth at their summons, and with a solemn brow and his finger on his lips, as if bidding them be silent and not wake

the sleeper, ushered them into the room in which Perrot watched his dead child. The fair corpse, decently laid out by the care of the village gossips, was placed on a sort of bier or pallet bed immediately beneath the window. The red hue of the winter sun gave a fictitious rose tint to the wasted and sunken cheek ; the hands were crossed on the bosom—the left uppermost, as if to show the wedding ring it wore—and within the cold stiff fingers was a sprig of holly, placed there by the simple love of the idiot brother. The yeoman rose with habitual reverence as the knights entered, and greeted them with a mute obeisance. Sir Grimbald stepped hastily forward, and, laying both hands on his vassal's shoulders, said, after coughing away an uneasy sensation in his throat,

‘How now, good yeoman? This is an evil chance and a sad ; but be of good cheer : it is all for the best, doubtless, and we must learn to say “God’s will be done” in all things.’

The yeoman bowed silently—he had evidently no power to speak.

‘I can feel for and with you, God wot,’ continued the knight ; ‘for I also have known a father’s grief for the loss of his first-born.’

‘But you did not, Sir Grimbald,’ said the yeoman, in a hoarse tone of agony, ‘you did not hear your child’s cry for help, and leave him to perish uncared for, as I did.’

‘Nay, good Giles,’ said Father Dennis, who, with a stout countryman, stood near the corse, ‘you reproach yourself without due cause. Your neglect of the cry for help proceeded from mistake, and from no lack of kind and Christian feeling. I wot well, that if you had believed it the wail of even a distressed or suffering beast, you would have hastened to assist it.’

‘I would, Heaven knows!’ said Giles Perrot, earnestly.

‘But it is terrible to think, father, that I heeded not the cry of my dying child. I feel as if I were her murderer. Yonder poor idiot, whose powers of sight and hearing Heaven hath quickened in recompense for his infirmity, was my monitor in vain. But,’ he added, with a piteous smile, ‘it will not be long ere I crave her pardon in a world where we can no more be deceived or mistaken.’

‘Talk not so gloomily,’ said the knight, kindly; ‘remember that the damsel—whom the Virgin assoil!—had been disobedient and light of conduct, and merits not all this grief on your part. Doubtless if she had lived, it would have been in shame, and penitence, and sorrow. The grave was the best shelter and refuge for her, poor lost one!’

‘She was a wedded wife!’ said the yeoman, pointing to the ring on the dead finger; ‘foolish and disobedient, it is true, noble sir, but returning like the prodigal son, of whom Father Dennis hath often spoken, to weep and repent her fault upon her father’s bosom. Alas! that I went not forth to meet her—to save her!’

He hid his face in his hands, and his strong frame trembled with anguish.

‘Be patient, good Giles,’ said Sir Gerald, ‘and think of taking revenge on the villain who lured her to this fate. What! look up, and be a man; I will aid thee with heart and hand to find and punish the base caitiff, be he knight or peasant.’

‘And I also, my noble young master,’ exclaimed the countryman, whom Gerald now recognized as the miller of Leighton; ‘I will pursue the wretch to the death, if it please Heaven and the saints to give us any trace of him. Poor Nelly! I would have saved her, as she well knew!’ He turned and dashed off a tear as he looked again on the dead body.

'Doubtless the sinner shall not escape the vengeance of Divine justice,' said the priest, solemnly, 'but it belongeth not to man to take the task of the avenger. In its own good time Heaven will judge the deceiver, believe me, with or without the aid of man.'

'Nevertheless, we will do our utmost to further its justice, father,' said Sir Grimbald, bluntly. 'Rely on our using every effort to discover the traitor, good Perrot, and bear up manfully against this affliction, that thou mayest aid in the search. And now, farewell. Fare thee well, also, pretty but misguided damsel,' he added, addressing the dead; 'an evil chance was it for thee and thine, that Heaven made thee fair. I will bestow masses on her soul, Perrot, for thy sake and the sake of thy poor wife, who is mercifully spared this new sorrow. Fare thee well.'

The yeoman thanked his lord briefly, and after a few words of encouragement and sympathy from the younger gentleman, the knights departed, leaving their unfortunate follower to the indulgence of his sorrow.

The village beauty was buried beside her mother, and the lord of the manor and his heir were of the number of mourners who followed her to the grave. Even the desire of vengeance on his child's destroyer appeared incapable of rousing or animating the yeoman from that hour. He could never forget that he had given no heed to his child's death-cry. The bitterness of remorse, united to deep and intense sorrow, wrought the work of years, rendering him feeble both in mind and body. Deep and kindly was the interest manifested for him by the noble inmates of the Hall, and their sympathy was the chief, perhaps the sole, consolation of his desolate age.

Sir Grimbald heard of the probability of another crusade with delight, and had readily given his consent to his son's joining the baron's party of *Croisés*; but as the time for his

young heir's departure for town approached, he grew restless and uneasy, and repeated many times his injunctions to him not to sail for the East before he had paid a second visit to his home.

'I am growing old, Gerald,' he said one day, as they had been conversing on the subject, 'and have many directions to give you and much to settle ere I can allow you to depart. You are my only hope now, and the sole protector of your noble mother and my little Constance when I am gone. I would fain keep you longer with us ; but if you think it right to visit my good Lord Fitzwalter, and learn for a certainty his plans, and when your sword will be required, go, my son, and Heaven's blessing be with you !'

The wish of the old knight had already detained Gerald at the Manor much longer than he had anticipated when he left London. It was a happy time for Constance. She had again a companion who could understand her thoughts and feelings, and guide and inform her mind ; whilst the unvarying tenderness and gentle attention of her early friend gave birth to hopes of future days and years of happiness, such as she then enjoyed. Gerald thought his former companion grown more bashful, sensitive, and timid than of yore, but he ascribed it to the lapse of time that had intervened since they parted, and the loss she had but recently sustained, and dreamed not that he was winning or encouraging an affection he could not return. At length he departed for London, leaving the old Hall to its usual grave monotony ; the sadness of Constance's look as she bade him farewell haunted his mind and caused a corresponding melancholy, which was not wholly dispersed till the bright eyes of Cicely Fitzwalter again beamed on him.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE LOSS OF THE TRENC-LE-MERE.

Look, what is done cannot be now amended.

SHAKSPEARE.

WINTER had departed, and June's red roses had succeeded the capricious beauty of April and the fragrant blossoms of May. The sunbeams of one of its brightest days shone on the tiny waves of the Thames, and enlivened even the darkest and narrowest lanes of the good city of London, as a knight, mounted on a tall black steed, and followed by a single attendant, turned from Thames Street into Queenhithe, at that period the quay where vessels laden with corn or wool were compelled to unlade their cargoes; the dues being there paid according to the value of the freight, and forming part of the revenues of the Queen Consort, Eleanor of Provence.

They who had known Edmund Fitzwalter a short year before would have had difficulty in recognizing, in the grave, pale, and melancholy individual in question, the spoilt and gay favourite of the Provençal Queen. The look of haughty indifference, or proud consciousness of superiority, which had then been the general expression of his handsome features, had been succeeded by an anxious, restless gaze; and deep thought or mental suffering had already imprinted many lines on his lofty brow. This was his first visit to London since the death of his friend. He had resisted alike the entreaties and commands of his kinsman to return to the city during the winter; and that some other motive than compliance with his wishes now brought him there, was evident from his directing his course to the

rendezvous of masters of trading vessels and busy merchants, instead of to the town residence of the baron — Baynard's Castle. Passing the store-houses of the merchants, and bestowing only a passing glance on the busy groups who thronged the quay, and made the clear morning air ring with their various cries and vociferations to their comrades on board the vessels lying beside the wharf, the knight reined in his steed at the door of a small house of entertainment, close down beside the river. It was a spot apparently little likely to attract notice, or to be visited by such a gallant. Low, in ill repair, and of most filthy appearance, it was evidently the haunt of the lowest of the merchant seamen, some of whom lay, even now, sleeping, half-intoxicated, in the sunshine outside the door: and a hum of drunken voices joining in a rude chorus within, informed the passers-by that, even at that early hour, there were carousers within its dirty walls. Stopping, as we have said, at this ill-favoured habitation, the knight bade his attendant summon the host. The command was obeyed by a personage who might well be the owner of such a dwelling, a sottish, heavy-looking man, as filthy as his abode; wearing the loose dress of a seaman of the period, probably out of compliment to his customers, as his awkward gait and want of the manner always peculiar to those who 'go down and occupy their business on the great waters' declared him to be, and to have always been, a landsman. He made a low obeisance to the stately rider as he approached him, and then demanded, with an air of sullen respect, 'what it was his pleasure to want with him?'

'The captain of worthy Master Gisor's stout vessel, the *Trencle-mere*, is, I am told, a frequent guest at your house, when his ship is in port. Is he now here?'

'No, truly, Sir Knight, and never will be more. He lies, with



many another good seaman, at the bottom of the salt sea. The vessel you name was lost, with both crew and cargo, on the Goodwin Sands, this last winter.'

'Lost, say you?' exclaimed the knight, changing colour; 'and all perished? Are you quite sure that none survived the wreck?'

'Certain of it, to my cost,' replied the man, gruffly; 'if any had been saved, it is here your knightly worship would have found them, for Captain Pigot was ever a staunch friend and customer of mine, and his crew followed their leader's fashion in all things.'

'And of the passengers the good ship carried over, were none saved?'

'Not a soul, nor any of the cargo, as I said before, Sir Knight.'

'I grieve to hear it,' said Fitzwalter, 'as a follower of mine own, a trustworthy knave, was bearing his sister in her to France, to join some kindred who dwell there. I would I had heard better tidings of them. And the old woman whom worthy John Pigot brought hither last autumn, is she still with you?'

The host hesitated for a moment. 'I am sorry to be the teller of such bad news to your honour—that is, if you cared for the old witch—but she is dead also, and the money left for her use has been expended in her funeral.'

'Nay, I cared nothing for her, save as the relative of a tried follower, for whose sake I would not have left her to perish. Here is a trifle, in guerdon of thy care of her.'

He threw a piece of money to the host, and, wheeling his horse round, retraced his steps into Thames Street. The man raised the silver from the ground, and looked after Fitzwalter with an air of successful and exulting roguery.

‘So!’ he thought, ‘another piece of money on the old hag’s account! Methinks, if she had been a witch, she would have known how to get and keep for herself all that has gone into my purse for her. I dared not tell him she had escaped and gone, the Evil One knows where, since her rascal grandson left us, for I was paid for her safe keeping; and he might have desired to see her, had I said she was still my lodger.’

Sir Edmund Fitzwalter rode on meanwhile towards Baynard’s Castle, with a smile on his lips, and a brow lightened of half the weight of care that had rested on it when he entered the city. He believed that the deep now held his secret! Through the hours of delirious fever, which fear, anxiety, and remorse had produced, Alinor Perrot had watched beside his couch, and her altered manner, when restored health and reason enabled him to perceive it, convinced him that his wild ravings had betrayed a horrible truth. His passing fancy (for he had never felt anything like love for the poor peasant girl) had grown less day by day; it became dislike when her reproving eyes at times rested mournfully on him, as if reproaching him for his heinous guilt and treason to his confiding friend, or when she shrank with involuntary horror from the touch of his hand. She never urged him now to reveal their marriage, or to permit her to confide her secret to her parents, as she had often before done; he saw that she shuddered at the sacred tie which bound her to him. But he was also convinced that he could not in safety woo the Lady Constance whilst Alinor lived in England. A thousand chances might set the girl free, and enable her to communicate with the lady, and then he well knew that he should have polluted his soul with blood in vain. Dislike and fear both urged him to remove Alinor from his path; but some touch of pity for her, and reluctance to plunge

into yet deeper guilt, induced him to spare the harmless life which was completely in his power. He resolved on having her conveyed beyond the seas; and Dickon, for a heavy bribe and the promise of a yearly stipend, undertook to place her in a foreign convent.

Fitzwalter desired her to prepare for an immediate departure to London, telling her that he should speedily follow her; and though she prayed earnestly that she might tarry till he went, and expressed her abhorrence and dread of the man in whose company she was destined to travel, she had at length obeyed his will, unsuspecting of evil designs on *his* part. But when she learned, on her arrival at the inn to which Dickon conducted her, that she was to accompany him and the ruffianly seaman, whose services had often before been employed by Fitzwalter, on board a vessel then lying in the river, the whole truth flashed on her mind, and with a cry of despair she rushed from the room and the house, flying wildly through the dark streets—for it was night—till a blow from her enraged and brutal pursuers laid her prostrate on the spot where Gerald Pauncefort and his friend had come to her rescue. Dickon, unwilling to encounter his lord's anger at her escape, or to restore the money entrusted to him to use in her behalf, allowed his deceived master to believe that he and the unfortunate Alinor had sailed in the *Trenc-le-mere*, of whose loss Fitzwalter, as we have seen, now heard. He, therefore, believed himself delivered both from the confidant and agent of his crimes, and from his unhappy lowly bride; and, confident in the success of his plans and purposes for the future, rode, with a lightened heart, into the courtyard of Baynard's Castle.

A party of horsemen, led by a noble of princely bearing, was about to issue from it as he entered, and at a glance the

knight recognized in the leader the Earl of Salisbury. Fitzwalter gave him a respectful greeting, which was returned with a frank and courteous salutation.

'I am glad to see you, Sir Edmund Fitzwalter,' he said; 'the note of preparation has, I trust, reached you, and brought you to join us. Gallant doings, Sir Knight, will there be, shortly, in the East, as my good lord your uncle will tell you. You purpose joining him, of course?'

'Such is not my intention at present, Lord Earl,' answered the knight; 'I have no great fancy for the East.'

'Fie on you for a sluggard!' said the earl, laughingly. 'I trust yonder fair cousin of yours will awake your sleeping valour. She has won many a champion to the holy banner by her spirit and beauty. The Franciscans and Dominicans have done nothing for us, compared to her. But I will not detain you longer.' And with a courteous farewell he turned to depart.

The Baron Fitzwalter gave his kinsman a warm welcome, and Edmund allowed him to believe it was in compliance with his wishes, that he had, at length, quitted his solitary retreat in Oxfordshire. The castle resounded with the noise of busy preparation for the approaching departure of its lord, and the eager old crusader took advantage of the first glance of curiosity which his nephew cast around him, to urge his wish that he also should make one of his gallant band of warriors.

'The brave Salisbury will have the flower of our nation in his troop of lances,' he said, 'and, since my own boys are too young to set forth on such an enterprise, I would fain have my nephew fight beside me in their stead.'

'Does the King still oppose his people's wish for a Holy War?' asked Edmund, evading a direct answer.

'Ay, and hath threatened my Lord of Salisbury with the confiscation of the estates it is his right to inherit, if he persist in his resolution. There is a tinge of the evil and cowardly tyrant John, in this his son and successor.'

'And yet his Grace doth not refuse his sanction to your departure on a similar errand?'

'No, in truth!' said the baron, bitterly; 'and it would please him well if I never returned! He has not forgotten—child though he then was—that my father brought Prince Louis's lances into England, in revenge for *his* father's crime, the murder of my own fair sister, your Aunt Matilda. King Henry loves me not, and would not be sorry if his equally detested subjects of the great city were to lose their standard-bearer and champion in Egypt.'

'I pray the saints his Grace may be disappointed, then, my good lord,' said the knight; 'and that you may return with increased renown from your holy undertaking.'

'I thank you, nephew,' replied the old noble; 'I thank you, and trust that you will share whatever glory our good swords may win for us. And in good time are you come, for the sudden decline of my old friend Sir Grimbald of Leighton has deprived me of the sword of his heir, your old comrade's brother.—By'r Lady! his name makes thee turn pale, even now. 'Tis folly, Edmund, to grieve for a dead man for ever in this fashion. Go with us to the East, and change of scene and active life will banish the fiend of melancholy from your soul, and make you gay and light-hearted as of old.'

'I would it could!' ejaculated his nephew, half unconsciously.

'And it will, boy, never doubt: there is nothing like change of scene and new habits to teach us to forget, as I have found ere now.'

‘Does my cousin Cicely tarry in England?’ asked the knight.

‘No, Edmund; we have had a shrewd lesson not to leave our damsels to the mercy of their liege lord, in your aunt’s sad fate. Cicely accompanies me to Egypt, in the train of the Queen of France. I will not leave her to be plagued with Provençal and Poitevin suitors, backed by the favour of the Queen’s royal thrall and husband! Young Gerald Pauncefort was to have headed the band who will escort her to Paris, to join her royal mistress, but this sickness of his father’s recalled him yester-morn to Leighton, and the slow nature of the good knight’s malady renders his return uncertain. But Cicely will rejoice if his place be taken by her favourite cousin.’

‘Hear you aught, my good lord, of the widowed betrothed, Constance de Lingard?’

‘Only that she is well, and resigned to the will of Heaven. She is now attending on her adopted father. ’Tis a sweet lady! as good as she is beautiful.’

‘And the old knight cannot live?’

‘Not many weeks, they say. His strength is consumed by a slow fever, and the Lady Pauncefort anxiously desired the return of his son to soothe his last moments.’

Sir Edmund Fitzwalter remained lost in thought for some minutes, and made no reply. The illness and probable demise of the old knight would prevent the possibility of his proffering his suit to Constance for many months; and the baron’s assurance that change of scene would relieve his spirit of its burden of sadness chimed in well with his own opinion. Might he not make expiation for his hidden guilt, and find comfort for his remorseful conscience, by a pilgrimage to the holy places of the earth? Resolving to reflect on this new view of his position deliberately before he finally decided, he requested per-

mission to visit his cousin, and the old baron conducted him to the lady's bower.

The reports circulating in the household, of the young heir of Leighton's devotion to his fair relative (which had been manifest to all), tended greatly to confirm Fitzwalter in his new purpose. As soon as Sir Gimbald should be gathered to his fathers, there was no doubt that his son would join the crusade and the lady of his love—high and hopeless as that love appeared to Edmund. The Lady Pauncefort must pass the year of her widowhood in seclusion, and Constance would dwell almost unseen—certainly, he believed, unwooed—till he should return from Palestine, to lay his laurels at her feet, and, with renewed peace of mind, reap the reward of his expiated crime in her love. Influenced by such motives and views, he feigned to be won by his kinsman's instances to join his gallant troop of crusaders, and took the Cross in company with many a knight of renown, in the fair Abbey of Westminster, a few days after his arrival in London.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE BETROTHAL.

This looks not like a nuptial!

SHAKSPEARE.

THE same glad sunbeams that lighted up the busy city with their cheering rays, penetrated a narrow loophole in Leighton Manor, and streamed in a long line of light into the sick-chamber of Sir Gimbald of Leighton. The knight

was alone, and lay gazing listlessly on the motes dancing in the sun's ray, occasionally turning his eyes, with a look of fretful impatience, on an hour-glass which stood on a table near his couch. One hand lay outside the coverlet, which was embroidered, and trimmed with a bordering of miniver; the other supported his head. The thin, hollow, and flushed cheeks, the sunken eye, and parched lip, and the extreme attenuation of the once stalwart old man's form, told how surely, though slowly, the fever had done its work. As he watched the last sands trickle from the glass, the door softly opened, and Constance stole gently into the room.

'Are you awake again, dear sir?' she said, as he turned towards the sound; 'I had stolen away for a moment to gather you some of my freshly-blown roses; their sweet perfume will refresh you.' And she offered him, with affectionate grace, a bunch of lovely flowers.

The invalid pushed them from him, with an air of angry impatience.

'I care not for them,' he said in a hollow tone, 'and would have rather thanked you, Constance, had you remained here till I woke, that you might have given me to drink. I have lain here, thinking the minutes hours, without a single attendant to give me a draught of water to quench my thirst.'

The flowers fell at his hasty touch from the hand that proffered them, and tears started into the girl's dark blue eyes. Hurrying to the table, she poured out a cooling draught, and brought it to the sick man. He drank it eagerly, and sank back with a sigh of pleasure on his pillow. Constance then gathered up her flowers, placed them on the table, turned the hour-glass, and patiently seated herself beside the couch. It was some minutes before the knight spoke again.



'Where is Gerald?' he then asked, abruptly.

'The Lady Edith has prevailed on him to seek a few hours' repose,' replied his fair attendant; 'because he looked so worn and exhausted by his night watch beside your couch, dearest father.'

'He is easily wearied,' said the invalid, peevishly: 'my poor Edward would have required many a night's watching to tire him; but he was a soldier, and no book-reading, effeminate idler.'

'Nay,' said the maiden, colouring deeply, 'now you do your son injustice, Sir Grimbald. He scarce drew bridle from London hither, and took small refreshment and no rest, till (seeing you sleeping) he yielded to the urgent prayer of my dear lady, and left you to my care, and Richard's. He is as brave, as active, ay, and loves you to the full as well, as Edward did.'

The knight gazed earnestly on her as she spoke.

'You are a zealous advocate for him, Constance,' he said, 'and perchance I did him injustice; but this consuming and torturing illness has made me harsh and impatient at times. Your pardon, my daughter, if I spoke unkindly to you.'

'Nay, I deserved a rebuke, sir, for leaving you, even for a moment,' answered the maiden, as she reverently pressed the hand he extended to her lips. 'I was to blame: old Richard was gone to dinner, and I might have thought you would not sleep long. But from the loophole I could see the garden, and the flowers looked so gay and beautiful, that I thought if I placed some in your chamber, they would gladden you when you awoke.'

'I thank you for your duteous kindness, my sweet child,' said the knight. 'And now listen to me, for I have somewhat of importance to discuss with you. You love Gerald, Con-

stance? Nay, why do you blush to say yea, dearest? Has he not been as a brother to you from your tenderest youth?’

‘Surely,’ murmured Constance; but she bent her head as she spoke over the roses she had again taken in her hand.

‘It will not, therefore, be so painful to you, to think of him as my brave Edward’s successor in betrothal to yourself—as well as to my lands and lordships, Constance—as if I bade you choose a new lord from strangers?’

He looked earnestly towards her, but her face was averted. He saw that she trembled violently.

‘Heaven forbid,’ he continued, ‘that I should have named another union to you, so soon after my gallant boy’s death, had I been in health, or Gerald likely to continue in England; but I am dying, Constance, and I would fain, when I meet mine ancient comrade in heaven, tell him that I have kept my promise, made to him on his death-bed. Look at me, my duteous adopted child, and tell me that you will not oppose my dying wishes.’

The young girl turned slowly towards him, as he desired, and with tears and blushes murmured, ‘that she had never disobeyed him, and never would.’ The knight drew her towards him, and pressed his lips with a father’s tenderness on her brow.

‘It is well, my daughter,’ he said. ‘If, as I doubt not, the spirits of the just care for, and think of, those whom they loved when living, I shall gladden a blessed spirit, by the recital of your dutiful gentleness and maiden virtues, when I meet him beyond the grave. Go, my pretty Constance,’ he added, more cheerfully, ‘and bid my beloved and honoured lady come to me.’

Constance rose to obey him, and quickened her pace as she

heard a well-known step approaching the chamber ; but at the door she encountered Gerald, who paused and gazed with wonder, and a momentary alarm, on her flushed cheeks and tearful eyes. He was about to ask the cause of her emotion, but the old knight called hastily to him, and she glided quickly past ere he could speak.

‘I am glad to see you looking better, sir,’ he said, as he took Constance’s vacated place ; ‘your sleep has, I trust, refreshed you?’

‘Ay, boy, I am better for a time ; but as thou well knowest my sickness baffleth the leech’s skill, and will render thee lord of Leighton Manor ere many days be gone by.’

‘Now, I pray the saints you may prove a false prophet, sir !’ said the young man, affectionately ; ‘it would be a heavy loss to Leighton, were their common father taken from its vassals.’

‘You will, I hope and believe, make up for my loss ; but ere I take my appointed place with the dead, I would fulfil a sacred and important duty. Promise me that mine honoured lady and wife, your noble mother, shall ever meet with all reverential observance from you,’

‘You cannot doubt it, sir,’ said his son. ‘I pledge you my knightly honour, my Christian faith, to show her the love and duty of a son, as long as I have life.’

‘It is well. And now for my last and dying wish.—You wot well that I promised my former friend, brave Sir Alan de Lingard, that his daughter should wed my heir ; and in fulfilment of that promise she was betrothed to your brother. Since you have succeeded to his heritage, I have, through the agency of Father Dennis, procured a dispensation, permitting you to redeem my plighted word in his stead, and ere I close my eyes in death, I would see her your wife.’

Gerald listened in silent amazement and embarrassment to his father's words. The possibility of such an event had never occurred to him, and the natural and dutiful reluctance he felt to oppose the will of his dying parent, united to the bashful reserve of his natural character, kept him silent for several minutes after the knight had ceased speaking.

'You do not answer me, Gerald,' said the sick man, impatiently; 'what means this silence?'

'Your proposal is so strange, so unexpected, sir,' replied the young knight, hesitatingly, 'I know not what to answer. The Lady Constance dearly tendered my brother, and it is not a year since he died; it would surely be an insult to her to proffer another love-suit yet.'

'Strange! unexpected!' exclaimed the impatient invalid; 'what folly art thou talking, boy? It was a thing of course that thou shouldst wed her; and for the insult to thy brother's memory—thinkest thou not that I, who loved him better than aught else on earth, would not jealously guard his memory from insult, now he is in the grave? It is nearly a year since it pleased Heaven to deprive me of him; and my state of health, and thy approaching departure for Egypt, render further delay mere folly. I must and will see my Constance—my portionless, orphan maiden—a wedded wife, ere I join her father in heaven.'

'But, noble father,' pleaded the knight, 'bethink thee! Is it generous to Constance, is it for her true happiness, to force her into a sudden marriage with one of whom she has never thought save in sisterly kindness?'

'Thou art duller than I deemed thee, Gerald,' said his father, peevishly. 'Seest thou not that the maiden loves thee? Canst thou not interpret her blushes, her timid smiles? I tell thee,

she hath this moment yielded no unwilling assent to my command that she should look on thee as her future lord.'

'Father!' said the young man, with sudden energy and determination of manner, 'I will hope your wishes have deceived you! The saints forbid that my sweet sister Constance should have wasted her affection on one who hath no love to bestow. I am no longer free to obey your will in this matter, sir, having plighted heart and hand to another lady.'

The Knight of Leighton had been always of a hasty temperament, and his irksome illness had rendered his fiery temper more irritable than was even its wont. A perfect frenzy of rage followed his son's reply, which every effort on the part of Gerald served only to augment. The incoherent and bitter reproaches with which he loaded him were silenced only by a swoon—the natural consequence of such violence on so enfeebled a frame.

Alarmed and shocked, Gerald hastily summoned the leech, whose exertions for some time failed to restore animation to his insensible patient. His efforts were watched and aided by Gerald with the most eager and painful solicitude; for he felt, with the agony of the bitterest remorse, that he had given the death-blow to his father; and when at length the knight's eyes feebly unclosed, and the hue of life returned, he turned aside to conceal the tears of thankfulness which he could not restrain, and murmured a heartfelt thanksgiving to Heaven that he was not an involuntary parricide.

On his restoration to consciousness, the knight manifested so much emotion at beholding his son, that the leech urged him to withdraw for a time. Gerald complied, and passed the remaining hours of daylight in solitary and painful reflection. He could not repent his candid answer to a request it would have been dishonourable for him to grant; but it was a bitter pang

for a nature so affectionate and feeling as his to know that he had embittered the few remaining hours of his parent's existence—perchance even hastened its close. Towards evening the fever-fit returned with redoubled violence, and the sufferer's total unconsciousness of his presence enabled the young knight to share the watch his mother kept beside the sick-bed.

There, in the deep silence of night, the unhappy son listened to the ravings of delirium, or sat silently gazing on the pale sad brow of his mother, whose mournful eyes involuntarily reproached him for her husband's sufferings. At times the knight addressed earnest and passionate excuses for not having fulfilled his promise to Sir Alan de Lingard, with whom he imagined himself conversing; spoke tenderly of his dead son, and compared his constant obedience with his youngest-born's refusal to comply with his dying wish; and his wild ravings of imaginary tortures, which he supposed Gerald was inflicting on him, wounded the young man deeply. The sufferer was only calmed by Lady Pouncefort's whispered assurances that his son repented of his fault, and would obey him. Thus passed the weary night, and towards morning, yielding to utter exhaustion rather than to sleep, the knight lay still and motionless. The good confessor, who aided with his slight knowledge the skill of the practitioner, then motioned Gerald to follow him into an adjoining oratory. The young man obeyed, almost mechanically, and as soon as they were alone, the priest addressed him solemnly.

'My son and pupil,' he said, 'it is fitting you should know that your good father, my worthy lord, is in extremity of danger; nay, I think he cannot survive many hours. He will wake from the kind of trance-like sleep in which he lies, probably, with the perfect possession of his reason, but it will be like the expiring

flash of a lamp—speedily quenched in death. If, therefore, you have aught to say to him—any compliance to make with his will—you must seize the first moment of restored consciousness to speak it, or it may be too late.'

'You are aware, father, I perceive,' replied the knight, much affected, 'that I have thwarted my noble father's will, and am the miserable, though unwilling and innocent, cause of hurrying his dissolution. Heaven knows that if he had asked the sacrifice of my own life, I would have cheerfully made it; but my assent to his commands in this instance would have ruined the happiness of a gentle lady, and have been altogether inconsistent with my honour.'

'You had once no secrets from me, my son,' said the confessor; 'will you still so far confide in me as to tell me to whom you have pledged your faith so suddenly and, I fear, so rashly?'

'Ay, father; but remember her name must be as sacred as the secrets of the confessional. I love and am loved again by the Lady Cicely Fitzwalter.'

'Nay, this is very madness, my son! Canst thou ever hope that the proud Baron Fitzwalter will give his daughter to a simple knight? Believe it not. The damsel hath done foolishly and immodestly in plighting her troth to you without her father's sanction; and if it be for her happiness you tremble, be sure it will be better secured by your breaking than keeping such an unsanctioned troth-plight. Do not believe that, even if you wedded her, in opposition (as it would certainly be) to the will of both your parents, you could be happy. Match in your own degree, my son, and in obedience to your dying sire, and Heaven will reward your dutiful self-denial with a peace the fruition of your own will could not give.'

'Father, I have said, were my own happiness in question, I

would not hesitate. You cannot know with what agony I have gazed on my suffering father through this night, or how bitterly I regret refusing to obey his dying commands. But what would my love think? How would she scorn me for suffering aught to induce me to break my troth!

‘If she be indeed worthy of your love, Gerald, she will approve of your dutiful self-denial, should you yield to your sire’s will. It is most improbable—well-nigh impossible—that you should ever wed her; let, therefore, your father’s spirit rest in peace, by resigning her *now*, as you must infallibly do hereafter.’

‘So be it, then, father,’ said his pupil, after an agitated pause, during which he paced the room hastily. ‘You have ever counselled me well and wisely, and I yield now to your reasonings. Pray Heaven my ambitious love, and enforced treason to it, may bring sorrow on my own head alone!’

There was a movement within the adjoining chamber as he finished speaking, and the priest instantly returned to his post by the sick man’s couch. In a few minutes he re-opened the door, and beckoned to Gerald to follow him. The Knight of Leighton turned eagerly towards them as they entered the room. He was, as the priest had foretold, restored to consciousness, but his son shuddered as he remarked how legibly the traces of approaching dissolution were stamped upon his countenance.

‘I thank you, Gerald,’ he said, extending his hand to his son; ‘I thank you for your compliance with my wishes. The father hath told me of your dutiful submission, and from my soul I thank and bless you for it.’

Gerald bent silently over the hand he held, already moist with the damp of death.

‘We will have no delay,’ continued the old warrior, eagerly;



'death is not far off, I know. I would see you my Constance's husband ere I close mine eyes for ever. Go, dame,' he added to his wife, 'go and summon the girl hither; Father Dennis shall wed them even now.'

The priest would have remonstrated, and urged his penitent to receive the last offices of the Church and prepare for his approaching change, but the knight interrupted him impatiently.

'There will be time enough afterwards, good father,' he said. 'I will brook no delay. Go, lady, and do my bidding.'

The Lady Pauncefort reluctantly obeyed, and the dying man continued during her short absence talking eagerly to his son, who, pale as death, still and motionless as a statue, stood beside his couch. He started from this kind of stupefaction as the lady re-entered the chamber, leading by the hand his destined bride. Pale, tearful, trembling, yet struggling for composure, Constance, still robed in mourning for her murdered betrothed, approached and raised her eyes timidly to Gerald's face as he advanced and took her hand in his, which was cold as death. The stern and agonized expression of his countenance made her start and half withdraw it; but the old knight called on her impatiently, though feebly, and with a beating heart she suffered Gerald to lead her beside the couch. Drawing her towards him, the guardian of her infancy solemnly blessed and embraced her, and then made a sign for the confessor to begin the marriage ceremony.

The priest obeyed, but the solemn words were scarcely begun when a sudden exclamation from one of the attendants who followed the lady interrupted him, and the bridegroom, springing hastily from the side of his bride, raised the form of his dying father in his arms. The knight gasped feebly for breath, and made a vain effort to speak. Laying aside his book, the

priest held before him the emblem of his faith, and urged him to think on his Redeemer. A faint smile rested on the features of old Sir Grimbald for an instant, as he gazed from the confessor towards his wife and children. Another struggle, a low rattle in the throat, and the Knight of Leighton lay a corpse on the breast of his son.



## CHAPTER XIV.

## IN PARIS.

And on his brest a bloodie cross he bore,  
In dear remembrance of his dying Lord,  
For whose sweet sake that glorious badge he wore.

*Facrie Queene.*

THE spirit of the Plantagenets slept in the bosom of Henry of Winchester, and—although he afterwards made his pretended intention of going on the crusade a plea for extorting money from his subjects—he angrily objected to his nobles' wishes of serving beneath the Oriflamme in the East. A few days after Sir Gerald Pauncefort left London to attend on his dying father, the leader of those bold spirits who, in defiance of the royal will, had assumed the Cross, was summoned by Henry's command to Westminster. The Baron Fitzwalter, who alone had obtained the King's permission to leave England, accompanied the Earl to take leave of his liege, and to receive from Queen Eleanor some missives and gifts which he was to convey to her royal sister Marguerite of France. They found Henry in the palace his taste had so beautifully decorated, sur-

rounded by a number of gaily-dressed young men, the greater number of whom were Provençals, or natives of Poitiers. A frown rested on the King's brow, as, turning on their entrance from a smiling youth with whom he was eagerly conversing, his eyes fell on the tall and stately form of William of Salisbury.

'So, my Lord Earl,' he said, after slightly returning his respectful salutation, 'you are resolved, in opposition to our will, to win a madman's fame or a fool's grave, it appears?'

'An it like your Grace——,' began William Longespée, a deep flush suffusing his countenance.

'It likes me not, Sir Earl!' interrupted the King; 'we have many times declared our averseness to these wild expeditions, which bring nought but trouble to the people engaged in them. What, I pray you, were the consequences of the crusade in which our royal uncle Cœur de Lion engaged, but loss of life to hundreds of our brave English, his own thralldom, and ruinous dissension in his abandoned kingdom?'

'Now, by St. George!' muttered Longespée, as the remembrance that the King's father had caused those dissensions in England recurred to his mind—but Henry would not hear the interruption, and continued, 'Never will we bring such misery on the nation committed to our charge! Far from seeking the easily-won guerdon of warlike fame, our study is to enlighten our people, and to introduce amongst them those arts which are the glory of the fair South.' The King glanced round the circle of foreign favourites, and a low murmur of applause followed his words. Salisbury ill repressed his impatience.

'Your Grace is doubtless right,' he said, 'in thinking our bold English would be the better for a little polish; but I much fear me we may as well hope to teach our northern eagles to sing like the nightingale, or our sturdy mastiffs to imitate the light

playfulness of those small greyhounds the Lombards bring us, as to make our bluff islanders take to singing, fiddling, and dancing, save in their own merry fashion. On my troth, my liege, a love of hard blows is born in us ; and trust me, if you keep your nobles and people from exercising their national taste in other lands, they will fight at home, even if they shake your crown in the tussle.'

'You are over-bold, Sir Earl,' said Henry, 'and but that the blood of Plantagenet flows in your veins, we would not suffer you to bandy words thus with us. We do not believe our people to be, as you assert, a mere race of bull-dogs ; and if you deem that our nobles are likely to forget their allegiance, it the more behoveth you to remain and give your support to your Sovereign and kinsman.'

'Nay, my liege,' replied the Earl, 'I hope you may never require my support in such a contest, though, believe me, William of Salisbury would shed his last drop of blood in defence of your Grace. I spoke but according to my knowledge of my countrymen, of whom you can learn nothing from Provençals and strangers.' He glanced somewhat contemptuously round the circle as he spoke. 'I would that your Grace would relent and sanction my intended enterprise, being—as I am—bound to it by a vow that man may not disallow.'

'Never, my Lord of Salisbury!' cried the King, warmly ; 'we are not so light and variable of mood. If you join the French crusade, you lose your fair English earldom !'

'So be it then,' said William Longsword, firmly ; 'it is better far that my father's son go forth a landless and penniless soldier, than that he should break his oath to Heaven.'

Henry turned angrily from the Earl, as if disdaining further converse with him, and addressed the Baron Fitzwalter.

'My Lord,' he said, 'you had our permission to go to the East before we feared that the mania for crusading would seize on our whole people, and we may not retract it. With whom do you bestow your fair daughter during your absence?'

'She accompanies me, my liege,' answered Fitzwalter. 'Queen Marguerite has consented to receive her as one of her attendant ladies, and I would rather she thus bore me company than tarried in a convent till my return.'

'Our lady the Queen would have gladly protected her till your return, had you decided on leaving her in England,' said Henry, graciously; 'but since that it is not to be the case, her Grace will give her letters of commendation to Queen Marguerite. Send her to the palace to-morrow, my good lord, and Queen Eleanor will give into her fair hands the gifts for her royal sister with which she had intended charging yourself.'

Fitzwalter expressed his thanks, and promised obedience to the royal command. As the King turned from him he beheld his son, the young Edward, then a tall, fair child of about nine years of age, holding Salisbury's large hand in his own small fingers, and eagerly discoursing with him, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

'What treason are you talking, fair son?' asked Henry, laying his hand fondly on the boy's bright curls.

'I was telling my cousin of Salisbury,' he answered, boldly, 'that I had far rather be an eagle than a nightingale, and that when I am a man I will emulate my uncle Richard, and win fame from the Soldan.'

'Tush! thou art but a foolish child,' said the parent, whose early indulgence and affection for his son were afterwards so well repaid, 'and talkest of that thou canst not yet understand. Thou wilt think differently when thou art a man.'

'No, by my faith, royal sire!' said the boy, earnestly; 'I would rather be a warrior and win fame by my good sword, than wear the crown of the whole earth without it. Ah! I love all music; above all, though, the blast of a trumpet!'

'A parlous boy,' said Henry, laughingly; 'the earth will have cause to fear such a firebrand. Go, child, to the Queen; my Lord of Salisbury is no fitting nurse for thee.' With a hard pressure of the warrior's hand and an affectionate farewell, the Prince obeyed, and the crusaders shortly after quitted the royal presence. The gallant Salisbury was destined never again to behold his little kinsman, as he left England the following day to implore the protection and assistance of the Sovereign Pontiff in the furtherance of his enterprise, and only returned for a brief interval before his final departure for the East.

The Baron Fitzwalter purposed making the journey by sea, and deputed Edmund, as her nearest of kin after her boyish brothers, to escort the Lady Cicely from Calais to Paris, where she was to join the ladies of Queen Marguerite's suite, and proceed with them to Cyprus. Twenty of the bravest of his followers, with several of the young knight's attendants and three or four waiting-gentlewomen, composed the group surrounding the litter of the Baron's daughter as she entered Paris. It was a bright summer morning, and the ever-busy city, just awaking from repose, resounded with the different cries of the public vendors of provisions, the Stentorian invitations of the owners of hot and cold baths, and the loud grief of several personages who, according to the strange custom of the times, were standing at their open doors and beseeching the passers-by to pray for the souls of friends who had that night been taken from them. Cicely was at first amused by all she saw and heard around her; but after passing through several narrow streets which bore a

great similarity to each other, she drew the curtains of her litter, and, shutting her eyes, amused herself by speculations on her approaching reception at the French Court ; trying to guess what was the Queen's style of beauty, whether the ceremonial of the palace would be like that of Westminster, and—though last, not least—if any new fashion of dress prevailed there which would render her own rich wardrobe unseemly or ridiculous. She had no great apprehensions of such a mischance, as each fashion of those ages was allowed a long and uninterrupted reign ere it was exchanged for another, and Cicely knew that her rare beauty raised her above the necessity of studying her dress, except as a matter of amusement and taste.

She was roused from these reflections by the sudden stopping of the curtained carriage, the squeaking of a pig, kicking of horses, and the passionate imprecations of their riders. Hastily withdrawing the curtain, she looked forth, and found the delay was caused by one of the privileged pigs of St. Antony having run between the fore-feet of a knight's *palefroi*, to the great displeasure and alarm of the noble quadruped, which was manifesting its annoyance by sundry curvettings beneath its angry rider, who vehemently anathematized the unlucky swine and its tinkling bell. Perhaps, however, he was not sorry for the opportunity of displaying his fine horsemanship, when, as he turned, he met the bright hazel eyes of the beautiful English girl, for he ceased his imprecations, and, with a look of surprised and delighted admiration, gazed on the fair apparition. As she blushed and drew back, half offended by the intensity of his gaze, he started, and, bowing with graceful courtesy, called loudly to his followers to make way for the lady's litter ; but Cicely would not proceed till her cousin rode up from the rear of the party, and then entreated him 'to keep close beside her

till she reached the palace.' Her words were heard by the stranger, who had paused till his fellow-traveller, a Hospitaller, joined him, and he immediately approached Fitzwalter.

'Your pardon, Sir Knight,' he said, 'for my unlicensed interference, but may I ask if you are one of our fair allies from England? If so, you will but lose time by proceeding to the Louvre—the King and Queen Marguerite are already gone.'

Edmund turned and looked earnestly at the speaker, as he answered him in the affirmative, expressing at the same time his surprise and regret that he had arrived too late to confide his charge, a noble English lady, to the care of Queen Marguerite before her departure.

'We were detained by adverse winds,' he said, 'and some trifling delays on the road; but I trust we may speedily overtake the royal party. May I pray you, of your courtesy, Sir Knight, to inform me of their route, and how long it is since they left Paris?'

'They left this delightful abode of pigs, priests, and beggars, soon after their return from Rheims, in which city King Louis, and his brothers of Poitiers, Anjou, and Artois, received the palmer's scrip and staff from the holy legate, Sir Stranger,' replied the knight. 'They are now many miles on their road to Lyons, where the Duke of Burgundy and the Count of St. Pol join them.'

'It is unfortunate,' said Edmund, in a vexed tone; 'my party was sufficiently strong to pass from Calais to Paris in safety, but your country, Sir Knight—if report speak truth—is even more plagued than our own land with ruffianly outlaws and robbers; and with my fair cousin to protect, I scarcely like proceeding so far through the heart of an unknown country with but twenty followers. It is truly an unlucky hap.'



'Nay,' said the young Frenchman, eagerly, 'be under no concern, sir; myself, and I am sure my good friend, Sir Auger de Chateaneuf, will be much honoured if the lady will allow us to join you in your delightful office. We also are going to Lyons, and have a strong body of men-at-arms with us, which will render the journey safe, at least.'

'We are much bound to you for your courtesy,' replied Edmund. 'My fair cousin, what say you to this gallant gentleman's proposition?'

'That I accept it gratefully,' answered Cicely, with a bright blush and a beaming smile; 'I should not have courage to proceed with only our present party, Edmund.'

The stranger looked delighted at her answer.

'Do you require present rest, lady?' he asked, gently. 'If so, we will tarry your leisure. Or does it please you to proceed now? We shall reach an auberge a few miles from the city, before the hour of dinner.'

'I am not at all weary,' she replied. 'Let us proceed immediately, if you please; we shall the sooner reach Lyons. But may I ask the name of the courteous knight who addresses me?'

'I am called Robert des Lys,' he said, after a moment's hesitation: 'a poor knight of France, from this hour the devoted servant of the fairest lady in Christendom. I would I knew by what name to proclaim her beauty!'

Cicely smiled at his mode of asking her name, and Edmund answered,

'The Lady Cicely Fitzwalter, daughter of the baron of that name, Sir Robert; and I am her kinsman, Edmund Fitzwalter.'

'An exquisite name!—Cicely!' said the young stranger, with

a playful extravagance of manner; 'it has a sound like soft music, and is henceforth written on my heart. And now, sweet lady, will it please you to proceed on your journey?'

The maiden, amused by the half-playful, half-earnest manner of her new admirer, gave a smiling assent, and the parties joining, left the good city of Paris together. Their suddenly-acquired acquaintance had that passport to the favour of his fellow-men, an open, expressive, and handsome countenance, and a stately, slight, and graceful figure. His manner, though courteous and refined, was haughty, and the flash of his eye at times indicated a hasty and impetuous spirit. He drew his companion the Hospitaller aside for a few moments as they left the city, and addressed him earnestly. Edmund observed that De Chateauneuf listened and replied with a degree of deference in his bearing that surprised him, but when they rejoined him, and entered into conversation, he ascribed the subserviency of his manner to the natural influence which a violent and imperious spirit always possesses over a timid and nervous character, and—singular as it was to find such a being in the Order of St. John, so famed for its indomitable valour and fortitude—Sir Auger de Chateauneuf was both. He was bearing, as an offering to the King and to the Grand Master of his Order, the contributions of the various Commanderies. He appeared to think highly of his own services, boasting continually of his importance as a brother of the Grand Master, and of the vast influence of his Order in the East, in all of which the stranger knight gravely coincided, with many an arch glance at his new friend, as his loquacious comrade proceeded.

They stopped to dine about noon at an auberge by the roadside, and the lady was assisted to alight from her litter by Sir Robert des Lys. Their repast was simple, but enlivened by his

wit and courtesy; and as Fitzwalter replaced his cousin in her vehicle, she whispered,

‘How glad I am, Edmund, that this French knight has joined us! Is he not delightfully entertaining and courteous?’

‘Ay, dear Cicely, and yet there is something I like not at times in his manner. He will be chief in all things, and can brook no opposition to his will. Thus much I have learned already. Do not give your heart to the conceited popinjay!’

Cicely smiled, and was silent. She could have assured him that such a gift was no longer in her power to bestow; and as she thought thus, her mind reverted to her English lover; and leaning back, she gave herself up to a waking dream of the future, in which the principal actor was the one who—dearly as he loved her—had nevertheless renounced her for ever. Well is it for us that we live in ignorance of events occurring elsewhere; that no magic mirror really exists, to show what a brief space of time, or a few miles of intervening space can do to blight our prospects, by changing the hearts on which we lean, or rendering it impossible for them to be all they, and we, fondly deemed they might be.

Cicely was happy in the bright vision that her active fancy conjured before her, and the hours did not appear long as they journeyed on, for her spirit held commune with the absent. At times the deep and melodious voice of Robert des Lys broke in on her reverie, as he carolled snatches of old songs, or his gay laugh sounded in the clear twilight air, as he answered some absurdity uttered by the Hospitaller. They passed the night at a village, and at the earliest dawn Sir Robert roused them to resume their journey. His fine features glowed with pleasure as the English maiden came forth, and thanked him for not letting them lose the beauty of the opening day in slumber.

‘I knew you would enjoy this bright sunrise, lady,’ he said. ‘Will you pardon me, that I have had your palfrey got ready for you to ride? Our journey lies through great woods part of the day, and I am much mistaken if you will not prefer the fresh air and lovely scenery to the confinement of a litter.’

Cicely thanked him, and the travellers again set forward, the young knight stationing himself at her bridle-rein.

‘You have been at the Court of King Louis recently, Sir Robert,’ she observed, as the young gallant rode beside her; ‘I would you could give me some knowledge of my future friends and intimates. Her Grace is a right royal lady, I hear.’

‘Of a truth is she—noble and gentle, but of a timid nature. ’Tis pity the King takes her to such a scene as a crusader’s camp. And yet,’ he added, ‘I rejoice at it, for otherwise it would not have been blest with the light of your beauty, lady.’

The English maiden bowed, and coloured slightly, but she was accustomed to homage—almost to adoration: it was a thing of course; and she continued,

‘I will not ask you to describe King Louis, for common fame reports him as nearer perfection than any other mortal; and his brothers, I ween, are gallant gentlemen. Do they resemble the royal crusader in character?’

‘No, indeed, lady,’ said Sir Robert des Lys, earnestly: ‘it would be well for them did they bear even as slight a likeness to him in character as they do in person. And yet I must not belie them,’ he added, laughing; ‘they are passing brave and noble, as times go, and but for the lustre of his Grace’s virtues, might be more thought of than they now are. Common fame says of them, that, as Louis is the holiest, so Alphonse is the subtlest, Charles the stoutest, and Robert the proudest knight in Europe.’

'Nay, that is an evil fame for two of them, Sir Knight—subtle and proud!'

'You do not class those faults, if such they be, together, lady, surely? Is pride a fault in a warrior and a prince?'

'Ay,' said Cicely, and she blushed as she remembered Sir Gerald, whose words she quoted. 'Pride could make a fiend of one who was an angel.'

'I cannot think that such a name could ever be applied to you, fair creature,' said her companion; 'and yet you—angel as you are—are very proud, or your lips, and eyes, and the very carriage of your graceful form belie you.'

'That may be,' replied the maiden, with some confusion; 'but my faults have nothing to do with Prince Robert's.'

'Could he blame himself for resembling you?' asked Des Lys, with animation.

A look of surprise from his companion checked his further speech.

'And who are the chief nobles engaged in this crusade?' she asked, after a pause.

'All the flower of our French warriors,' replied Des Lys: 'the large, heavy, simple-minded, but brave De Joinville, Seneschal of Champagne, the haughty Lord de St. Pol, the Duke of Burgundy, and every other noble name that speaks of our country's glory. Lady, when you behold the host assembled round the Oriflamme, you will acknowledge that our France is the first nation of Christendom!'

'Now shame on your lack of gallantry, Sir Stranger!' said the lady. 'What! assert the pre-eminence of France over her own country to an English maiden?'

'The pre-eminence of its men only, sweetest lady; I own that the dames of the cold spot they call their "merry" Eng-

land, are the loveliest of the earth, and will uphold them for such with my good lance and sword against all gainsayers.'

'I thank you in their name, Sir Robert des Lys; and for the zeal you express in their cause, I will give you a friendly warning. Let no vaunt of France's pre-eminence over England meet the ear of the brave William of Salisbury, our redoubted Longsword, or it will never be repeated by you.'

'By St. Denis!' exclaimed the knight, his handsome features glowing with anger, 'would you threaten me, lady, with your English hero?' Then, in an instant, he checked the fit of passion which, if roused by one of his own sex, had been quenched only in blood, and laying his hand gently on the bridle of her palfrey, in tones of low and musical entreaty implored Cicely's pardon, and acknowledged his discourtesy in having spoken slightly of her country, ending, however, by an energetic wish that he might 'meet this English earl in the lists, and teach him——'

The irrepressible smile that curled his listener's lip, and the arch expression of her eye, reminded him that he was repeating the offence for which he had apologized, and with an ingenuous blush and a hurried repetition of entreaty for pardon, he turned away. Cicely was rather amused than offended, and little did she deem that the jealousy her accidental mention of William of Salisbury had awakened would one day be attended by fatal consequences, or that the half-playful threat, uttered in the sunny greenwood, would be the cause of dyeing the sands of Egypt with Christian blood.

They proceeded on their journey through the forest with renewed harmony, and the maiden had reason to rejoice at her present mode of travelling, so beautifully picturesque were the rich glades or thickly shaded paths they traversed, and so ani-

mated and interesting the conversation of her companion. Immediately behind them rode Sir Edmund Fitzwalter and the Knight of St. John—the latter quite as well pleased as either Cicely or her knight, for he had secured a silent and patient listener. Edmund would have wearied of his fellow-traveller's twaddle about his Order, had he not been pre-occupied by a strong feeling of uneasiness and curiosity, caused by a circumstance which had attracted his attention on their journey. Whilst resting at the auberge the preceding night he had observed a strong and powerful man enter the kitchen, who, after attentively regarding him for some minutes, inquired, in a low tone and in the Norman French—which long association with their conquerors had rendered comparatively familiar to the Anglo-Saxons—'whether this was the party of English crusaders who were going to join King Louis?' On receiving an answer in the affirmative, he seated himself in a farther corner of the apartment, and during the time the knights were partaking of their evening meal—the Lady Cicely supped in her own chamber—the Englishman never raised his eyes without encountering the keen brown orbs of the stranger, fixed on him. There was something peculiar in the expression of those eyes: they had a sort of fascination for Edmund Fitzwalter; and even when gazing on his trencher, he felt that they were on him, although he saw them not. The man's countenance also was familiar to him, though he could not recall distinctly where or when he had before seen him. But, as if by a spell, it conjured before his mind's eye the Leighton oaks, the yeoman's pretty daughter, and the fatal summer which had ripened so many evil fruits in the ill-regulated garden of his mind. Alas! for an unquiet conscience! The fixed gaze of a peasant had power to shake with undefined terror the proud de-

scendant of the Fitzwalters! Although he believed that the deep sea covered the sole witness of the deed of blood his hand had wrought, he could not overcome the secret conviction that the stern look of the English churl—whose presence in such a place was certainly singular, as he was apparently travelling alone—was at once menacing and reproachful. He resolved that as soon as his companions should retire to the sleeping-chamber which the scanty accommodation of the auberge obliged him to share with them, he would question the stranger, and learn from whence he came and what he desired of him; but by the time Sir Robert and the Hospitaller withdrew, the peasant traveller had also disappeared, and Sir Edmund was unwilling to give importance to a trifle, or to betray his own uneasiness by making inquiry after him. Nevertheless, the face haunted him in sleep and was present to his waking fancy, rendering him a moody and abstracted listener to the Knight of St. John's unprofitable chat.



## CHAPTER XV.

## DOUBTS AND FEARS.

Is thus my love returned?

Is this my recompense?

*The Revenge.*

THE last tributes of affection and respect were paid to the mortal remains of the Knight of Leighton, and in the dull, sad pause in existence which follows the putting our dead out of our sight, Sir Gerald had full leisure to reflect on his new position, and to brood over the disappointment of his



most cherished hopes. If his own happiness alone had been sacrificed to his strong sense of filial duty, he could have borne it; but the thought that, in return for her generous preference of himself, he had doomed Cicely Fitzwalter to the misery of disappointed affection, was more than his fortitude could support, and for weeks the heir of Leighton lay on a bed of suffering, from which he recovered so slowly, that the Lady Pauncefort believed her cup of sorrow was not yet full, but that she should have to mourn for her younger son's early death, as well as for that of her lord. And when health was again restored, he continued in a state of morbid melancholy. His ardour for the holy enterprise in which he had embarked was gone; he reproached himself for the mere worldly motives which had mingled with his former zeal, and believed that Heaven in displeasure had deprived him of the idol which, almost without his knowledge, had stood between him and the one thought that should have filled the mind of a soldier of the Cross—the recollection of the Holy Sepulchre. On the bed of sickness he reflected—with shame at his selfishness—that he had profaned the sword consecrated to the service of Heaven by designing to carve out with it a loftier lot for himself on earth than it had pleased Divine Wisdom to bestow. The self-knowledge gained by those hours of solitary thought humbled his conscientious spirit, and gave a yet deeper shade to the dejection which preyed on his mind. The widowed mother and the affianced bride, whose lives were bound up in his, ascribed it to the loss they all mourned, and loved him the better that he thus sorrowed for the frank, kind-hearted old knight.

Two months had elapsed after Sir Grimbald's death ere Sir Gerald reminded the bride, at whose side he had stood in the chamber of the dying, of her interrupted vows. It was on an

August evening, as the affianced were walking slowly in the thick grove which encircled the park like a leafy girdle, that he spoke.

‘Constance,’ said the knight, gently, ‘it is time for me to think of my departure for the East. King Louis sails this month for Cyprus, and is desirous that every knight who has taken the Cross should join him there, so that the united armament may inspire the Saracens with dread by its numbers and gallant appearance upon landing in Egypt. I dread announcing this necessity to our good lady mother; will you, who have such a gentle gift of comforting and soothing, impart my wishes to her?’

Constance turned pale at his first words, but had recovered her self-possession as he finished, and answered,

‘Ay, Gerald, if you so will it; but must you depart so very soon? Can you not tarry yet a little longer?’

‘No, dear lady, I cannot consistently with my honour; I am bound by a promise to my noble leader, the Baron Fitzwalter, to join him as speedily as I may. It will occupy some little time to settle all my affairs before I leave Leighton, and I have then a long and tedious voyage before me.’

‘I will tell our mother,’ said Constance, with a sigh, ‘but I dread her sorrow! She has been so heavily afflicted in the course of one short year!’

‘I am sorry for her sake that I took the Cross, but it would have been foul shame for one reared to the defence of the Holy Sepulchre to have heard the call to arms in its cause, and remained deaf to it.’

There was a pause. They were within sight of the Hall, and the lady was about to wish her companion good even, and leave him to the solitary stroll in which he had recently spent his evenings, when he detained her, in great agitation.

'Constance,' he said, speaking rapidly and with vehemence, 'I have not forgotten that we stood before the priest, by *his* bed-side who is now with the saints in glory. Believe me, I deem myself as solemnly your wedded husband as if the words which bind for ever had not been so fatally interrupted. But before I leave England, I would fain complete my vows to you. Say, will you forego all scruples of mourning etiquette and maidenly delay, and fulfil our noble parent's last wish, by giving me at once your hand?'

The violent agitation of his manner, his eager vehemence, disturbed and confused the young girl, even more than such a demand would naturally have done, and she was obliged to lean upon him for support for many minutes, pale, silent, and trembling, ere she could reply to his entreaties for pardon for his abruptness, and to the affectionate words with which he sought to compose her. Her emotion gave birth to a hope he had dared not indulge before; and when she faltered forth her willingness to abide by *his* will in all things, he took her hand, and bending over her with a flushed cheek and eager eyes, implored her, with touching earnestness, to speak candidly, and to tell him if their union would be for her happiness—if she gave him her hand voluntarily, or only in filial obedience to the dead—if, in short, she loved him? He entreated her to speak frankly to him, assuring her that if it were her wish to be free, he would not urge her to fulfil their betrothment. And Constance, who believed that his agitation proceeded from fear of her rejection, answered his question with a blushing but earnest sincerity, that left him no place for doubt. It was happy for her that her own emotion and the darkening twilight—for the sun had set, and the thick trees rendered the spot on which they stood obscure—prevented her perceiving the expression of his coun-

tenance as he listened to her—that she did not behold the shadow of despair succeed the light of a momentarily revived hope. The tone of voice in which he thanked her, jarred, though, on her ear, and she felt an undefined fear, even at the moment which brought the fruition of her day-dreams.

They entered the Hall together, and Gerald then left his betrothed, under the pretext that he wished her to communicate what had passed between them to his mother ; in reality, that he might snatch a brief interval to indulge his repressed anguish, and reflect for the last time on the beautiful, and, he believed, devoted woman on whom his thoughts might never again dwell.

After a restless and unhappy night, the young Lord of Leighton rose with the dawn, and walked into the village ; but his present mood rendered him averse even to the encounter of the few rustics going to their daily toil, and he turned down one of those quiet, shady lanes, peculiar to England, which have so inviting an aspect for the musing or melancholy man. The path terminated, after a gentle ascent, on a small eminence overlooking the barren heath of Charlewood, once the residence of old Mab. The morning breeze blew freshly across the desolate common to the brow of the young knight, and the solitary sadness of the scene accorded well with his feelings. He threw himself on the grass of the hillock, which was thickly strewn with fairy-like harebells, and, resting on his arm, gazed in moody abstraction on the shadows fleetly chasing each other over the plain. And many a sad and bitter thought did they suggest to the muser's mind, of the fleeting nature of all that is most sought and cherished on earth ; for Nature is full of mysterious sympathies with her children, and they who love and observe her can generally find something in accordance

with their own feelings in the scenes she offers to their gaze. When Gerald Pauncefort, as a boy, had looked on the same appearances, they suggested far different thoughts to him: *then* he marked how brightly the sunlight chased the gloom; *now*, how rapidly the shadow fell upon the sunny spot.

He was roused from his reverie by a quick, light footstep, and, looking up, beheld the idiot boy of the farm, within a few paces of the spot where he reclined. Poor Giles was busied in gathering a bouquet of harebells, pausing at intervals to shake their light, graceful bells, and listen to the low rustling sound they made. Thus engaged, he stood close beside the knight ere he perceived him. Then starting, he muttered a half-frightened excuse for his intrusion.

'Are you gathering a posy for your lady, Giles?' said Sir Gerald, kindly.

'Ay, Sir Knight—the fairest I can find here now. They are not sweet, like the violet—but that is gone! It was Ally who always took the first bunch of violets to our Lady Constance, but she is gone too — to fairyland perchance,' he added in a low tone—'and I cannot find any.'

'Why do you think your sister is in the land of the fairies, Giles? Did you not see her laid in the village churchyard?'

'Oh, I remember!' said poor Giles, with a sudden look of sadness, 'she is dead; but John Miller is gone to kill the wicked knight who took her away from us! Old Mab told him where to find him.'

'What do you mean, poor fellow?' asked his lord; 'old Mab was gone from Leighton before your sister perished.'

'Ay, but *she* was not dead, and John Miller used to go and see her every day; and then she died, and he went away. Do you think, Sir Knight, he will soon return?'

'This is a strange tale, if it be true,' replied the knight. 'Are you sure, Giles, that you speak truly? Who told you that John Miller was gone, and how long is it since he went?'

A long, long time,' said Giles, shaking his head; 'a week, or a month, or a year, I do not know which; but the wheel stands still, and the water lies hushed and sleeping round the mill.'

'A year! that is impossible!' said Gerald, rising with some curiosity; 'yet, poor fellow, you ever tell truth as far as you comprehend what you say. I will seek the miller, or learn from the other vassals wherefore he hath left Leighton. Come with me, Giles, and try to remember when you last saw the miller, and what he said to you.'

The idiot obeyed, and walking rapidly beside the knight as they returned to the village, told a long and confused story of the witch's return to Charliewood; of how the people feared her, and how she told John Miller some terrible secret when dying; that the miller had met him in the greenwood one morning early, and told him he was going to take vengeance on Alinor's murderer; and that he had begged to go with him, but bold John had refused to let him, and promised to come back soon. All this the knight gathered by degrees from his rambling words, for he wandered from one subject to another, and only one who, like Sir Gerald, had been accustomed to him from early youth could have understood him. Eager to ascertain the truth of this strange statement, Sir Gerald directed his steps to the miller's house, a village home that had once emulated the picturesque beauty of the Beech Farm. As he approached the little armet of the Ouzel on which it stood, he perceived that part of the tale at least was true, for the water was quietly slumbering in the sunlight, and the wheel at rest. Unlatching the

door, he entered the house and called loudly; a faint echo of his own voice was the only reply. The simple furniture of the long low room in which he stood was covered with a thick mantle of dust; some busy spiders had already taken possession of most of the corners; and the bow and arrows and quarter-staff, which Gerald remembered as distinguished ornaments of the miller's walls, were gone. Silence and desolation were sole tenants of the pretty rural homestead.

The knight hastened from the spot and proceeded immediately to the Hall, where, hastily summoning the steward, he demanded angrily, 'Wherefore he had not been informed that the mill was deserted, and what had become of the miller?'

'So please you,' was the old domestic's answer, 'so please you, Sir Knight, I have intended to tell you of it from day to day, but you took on so heavily on account of my lord's death, that I feared to awake your grief by naming it to you.'

'And how can this rustic's disappearance be connected with my late lord and father's death?' asked Sir Gerald, impatiently.

'Nay, Sir Knight, I said not that it was connected with it—but I will tell you the whole story. Just before my lord, your late father, was taken ill, a rumour got afloat that the witch Mab of Charliewood, who by art magic had escaped from the strong chamber in the west turret, had returned to her old home. My lord knew it not, for most men feared to do any harm to *her*, and knew that he who should reveal her return to the knight or confessor would condemn her to the stake; but all shunned the unholy neighbourhood, and no foot ever pressed the sod of Charliewood save John Miller's, and he was warned not to go. On the very night Sir Gerald died the miller came to the Hall, and demanded to speak with my lord. He looked pale and horror-stricken, and told me that he had just left the fearful

gammer's death-bed, and that she had confided a secret to him, making him first swear to reveal it only to Sir Grimbald. "But since it hath pleased Heaven to take him, I shall not hold myself forsworn if I reveal it to his successor," he added.

'And wherefore came he not to me?' demanded the young knight.

'Alas, my noble master!' said the steward, 'you were delirious for many days. And when the miller heard that it was thought you could not live, he told me that he would tarry no longer, but execute vengeance himself on one who had deeply wronged you. "Our cause," he said, "is the same. Tell my good young lord—if it please the saints to spare him, Master Steward—that delay may prevent the traitor who had so deeply wronged both of us from meeting the just guerdon of his crimes; and that John o' the Mill will, with Heaven's blessing to boot, avenge his noble master and himself with his own right hand." He departed, Sir Knight, and I could not say him nay: you wot well he is a freeman.'

'A most singular circumstance!' said the knight, musingly. 'You were to blame for not telling me this before. Heaven grant that he may return before I leave for the East, for, if I err not, he seeks the wretch who lured poor Alinor Perrot from her home, and who is, I believe, even yet more deeply stained with crime. Did you gain any trace of the way he meant to journey?'

'None, Sir Gerald. He was, he said, bound by an awful oath to reveal where and why he went only to yourself. I saw and could learn no more of him after the time I have mentioned to you.'

'Endeavour to learn from the villagers if they know aught of his route, and bring me what tidings you can obtain.'



The steward promised obedience, and the knight sought his mother to communicate to her the strange tale he had just heard. It afforded a subject of conversation during the noon-day meal, for the interest and curiosity of both ladies were roused by it. Gerald would not distress them by communicating the suspicion which filled his own mind, that the destroyer of Alinor and his brother's murderer were the same person; but so deep an impression had the domestic tragedy of the farm made on their minds, and so much did they consider their vassals' interests their own, that they marvelled not at the miller's assertion that he went to avenge *their* injuries, and gave no further and hidden meaning (as Gerald did) to his words. When they were again alone, the Lady Pauncefort addressed her son on the subject of the communication which Constance had made to her the previous evening.

'You are right, Gerald,' she said, 'to celebrate your nuptials ere your departure for the East. I do not complain, believe me, my dear son, of your fidelity to your engagements; your honour is dearer to me than my own happiness, and it is both right and natural that Constance should accompany you. The urgent necessity for joining the army of the Cross may well excuse your marrying ere the period of mourning be expired, and I will cheat the weary hours by pilgrimages and prayers till you bring my daughter back to me.'

'Bring Constance back to you, dear lady!' exclaimed Sir Gerald; 'you do not surely think I would deprive you of your sole comfort, and expose my bride to the perils of Eastern warfare?'

Constance gazed on him in pained surprise as he spoke.

'Not take me with you, Gerald?' she murmured; 'then wherefore should we wed now?'

‘Because, sweet Constance, it was our dead father’s wish we should ere I departed. Because I shall then leave you the protection of my name and kindred—the possession of my heritage.’

‘Nay,’ cried the maiden, rising, and speaking hurriedly, ‘I will not hear of it! Not to share your wealth, and dwell your honoured but widowed wife in your forsaken home, will I wed, ere my tears for him who was the only father I knew are dry! To have shared your perils, to have been near your couch of suffering or sickness, I had wedded you this hour; but for no other reason, Gerald. And yet deem me not ungrateful,’ she added, approaching him, and timidly taking his hand: ‘the thought of your generous affection will soothe many a lonely hour when I have only remembrance of the past to console me.’

‘And hope of the future, my noble Constance!’ said the young man, with a momentary enthusiasm; ‘I may return a victorious soldier; will you not then welcome me?’

‘In victory or defeat—honour or dishonour—if such can be named in connection with yourself, Gerald,’ she replied. ‘I’ faith, ’t is sinful of me, but I can scarce refrain from wishing that I could prove to you in the hour of danger or distress how dear you are to me! And yet I would not that you should be in peril or sorrow.’

‘I require no proof of your generous self-devotion, dear Constance,’ said the knight. ‘I have known you, remember, from infancy, and your pure and loving spirit is as open to me as my own soul. But you will not, I hope, persist in your refusal.’

‘Ay, but I will! So urge your suit no longer, for it would be vain. I will wear the willow for your sake till you return—unless,’ she added, with a blush, ‘I too may be a crusader.’

‘It cannot be,’ was the hasty answer; ‘I cannot expose you to such peril and inconvenience.’

'Then I will share my mother's prayers and vigils for your sake, Gerald.'

'So thou wilt not be persuaded to promise obedience yet, Constance?' said the Lady Pauncefort, with an attempt at playfulness.

'No, in truth, dear lady.'

A pause ensued, and shortly after Gerald left the room. His mother but too well understood wherefore he had not more earnestly urged his suit. She would have joyfully seen Constance accompany him to Egypt, though at the expense of many lonely hours to herself; nevertheless, she doubted not his honour, and trusted that time and the gentle virtues of her adopted daughter might render their union, at length, no sacrifice on his part. A sigh from the betrothed roused her from her reverie. The maiden was standing near the window, and had at that moment caught sight of the young knight passing the drawbridge with a hurried and agitated mien. The Lady Pauncefort, who advanced to her side, saw him also; and the deep pity that mingled with the affectionate interest of her tone, when she again addressed Constance, struck on the maiden's ear as the knell of hope. She felt that the same conviction had come to both their hearts, that Gerald fulfilled the dictates of duty, not of affection—that he offered her merely wealth, and the station of a wife, but withheld the only gift she coveted—his love.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

## A ROYAL SUITOR.

Chevaliers en ce monde-cy,  
 Ne peuvent vivre sans-soucy,  
 Ils doivent le peuple défendre  
 Et leur sang pour la foi éspandre.

*Vielle Chanson.*

THE travellers proceeding to join the army of the Cross, halted for the night, about a week after they left Paris, at an auberge in a small town near Lyons. As the size of the house far exceeded that of the inns at which the preceding nights had been spent, the sleeping-apartment of Fitzwalter was only shared by his esquire, Richard Trafford, who lay immediately before the doorway, to prevent any intrusion into his lord's dormitory from without. Sleep fell heavily upon the weary eyelids of the youth, unbroken by the restlessness or fears of a disturbed conscience, and Edmund envied his calm repose, as he lay tormented by the memory of the past and dread of the future. The hostel was hushed in a profound silence, broken only to the ear of the knight by that tick of a spider, near the head of his bed, familiarly called the death-watch. At any other time the bold-spirited warrior would not have remarked it, or heeded it only to smile at the superstition which assigned its name; but now he shuddered at its sound. For months, from the hour in which ungovernable passion had polluted his soul with the ineffaceable stain of blood, the brave young soldier—he who had never known the meaning of the word Fear, and who would have quailed before no mortal strength or prowess—was, in solitude, a coward. He had vio-

lently driven forth, from its tabernacle of flesh, an immortal spirit, and now he felt as if that disembodied and aggrieved soul were constantly about him. True, he saw no visible appearance, but he in a manner *felt* its presence, and at no period so sensibly as when solitude and the dark silence of night gave free play to his excited imagination. He lay, therefore, listening with a feverish impatience to the constant and melancholy sound, which appeared to grow louder and more distinct, and then he felt that oppression in breathing and weight in the air that pressed on his brow, which he ever ascribed to his unearthly tormentor. It was almost a relief from such sensations when a cry from a human voice reached his ear, even though it uttered the fearful sound of 'Murder!'

He sprang from his couch, and—bold in a moment, at the prospect of meeting a living foe—roused the slumbering squire, as the cry was repeated.

'Wake thee, Richard!' he cried, 'there hath some evil chanced to our comrades. Follow me!'

And flinging his mantle round him, and seizing his sword, the knight strode hastily from the apartment. They had proceeded half-way up the narrow passage, following the direction of the sound, when a man, enveloped in a dark mantle, rushed hastily past them, overthrowing the slight stripling in his headlong career, and extinguishing the lamp he carried.

'It is the murderer—the robber,' cried Fitzwalter. 'Villain, thou shalt not escape me!'

But in the darkness he stumbled over the prostrate Trafford, and the robber effected his escape. Lights now appeared in an opposite direction, and in a few minutes Fitzwalter was joined by the host, two tapsters, and the French knight, who had been roused from their slumbers by his shouts after the assassin.

'Now, by St. Denis,' exclaimed Des Lys, as they hurried forward, 'I hope no evil hath chanced to the poor Hospitaller! 'Tis an arrant coward, and most notorious boaster, but I would not that harm should come to him, specially as he is the bearer of moneys from the French Commanderies that may be greatly needed.'

They had gained the chamber of the Hospitaller, as he finished speaking, and beheld its unfortunate tenant seated on the side of his bed, pale and aghast, pressing both hands upon his throat, and looking so ludicrously terrified, that the young men with difficulty restrained their laughter.

'How now, Sir Auger!' said Sir Robert, 'what hath chanced to you? No evil, I hope?'

'Thanks to the saints you are come,' replied the unlucky De Chateaufneuf, 'I had been a dead man else! See how the villain hath left the mark of his iron fingers on my throat. Methought I should never again draw my breath!'

'Now, fie on thee, Sir Knight!' said Des Lys, with mock gravity; 'didst thou make all this turmoil, and rouse us from our beds, about one man? Could not thine hands keep thine own head?'

'He took me at a 'vantage,' said the Hospitaller, sullenly: 'I was asleep when he woke me with the pressure of his accursed fingers, shouting in my ear, too, "Awake, thou double murderer! and learn that Heaven's vengeance hath only slumbered!" I struggled to get at my sword, and in turning, the light fell on my face, when he started, letting go his hold.'

'And you did not seize him? You suffered him to escape?' asked the knight, in a tone of contemptuous surprise.

'How could I seize the ruffian? It was some minutes before I had breath enough to repeat my cry for help, and as he ex-

tinguished the light instantly, I could not see to pursue or secure him.'

'T is passing strange!' said Des Lys; 'he could scarce be a robber, since you say that he wilfully roused you from sleep. How could you have incurred the fellow's enmity?'

'I never beheld his ill-favoured face before,' answered the discomfited military friar; 'and for murder—by Holy St. John! I am guiltless of causing the death of mortal man—save only of the enemies of the true faith, in fair combat.'

'Of whom you have, doubtless, slain some dozens, most valiant Gascon,' muttered Sir Robert, sarcastically; adding, 'Perchance the ruffian mistook your chamber, and would have inflicted on you the vengeance he meant to take on another.'

Edmund Fitzwalter now spoke. 'I think it far more likely, sir, that the valiant Hospitaller hath been disturbed from his repose by a maniac. Hast any of those poor possessed ones in thy neighbourhood, mine host?'

'A many of them,' answered the publican, eagerly, desirous of saving his hostel from the imputation of robbery and attempted murder. 'Surely, fair gentlemen, there are Jean Grosdidier, Albert Louval, and——.'

'Enough, enough!' interrupted Sir Robert; 't is doubtless as the worthy Sir Edmund thinks; but I charge thee, host, as thou hopest to keep whole bones in thy body, see that thy doors and windows are securely fastened, that none of such an evil neighbourhood may again intrude on our party. Away, and see that all be safe!'

The host, who had stood, red nightcap on head and lamp in hand, listening to the discussion with distended eyes and open mouth, joining in it by means of sympathetic and expressive shrugs and low ejaculations to the saints, departed very unwill-

lingly at the abrupt and stern command of the young knight, followed by his servitors. As soon as the travellers were alone, Des Lys requested the Hospitaller to ascertain whether the money in his possession was safe. On inspection, the boxes under the knight's care were discovered to be untouched, and no doubt remained in the minds of two of the party, that it was really a maniac who had thus appallingly broken on the hours of darkness. But Fitzwalter returned to his apartment with a very different conviction: he could not divest himself of the idea that the midnight visitor of De Chateaufneuf had mistaken that knight for himself, and that it was the same man whose riveted gaze on him during the supper of the previous evening had so disagreeably affected him. But who and what was this stranger? The only witness of his crime had perished in the sea, and need be no longer dreaded, and the features of the peasant whose presence had filled him with an undefined dread were but indistinctly remembered by him.

When Fitzwalter descended to the kitchen of the inn the next morning, he found Cicely and her maidens listening to the young French knight, who was giving them an animated and ludicrous description of the scene of the past night. The damsel Fitzwalter laughed merrily at his picture of the terrified De Chateaufneuf, seated on his pallet, holding his throat, as if to 'make assurance doubly sure' that his head was still on his shoulders, and the fat host in his night-gear, with his gaping tapsters, listening to his pitiful tale of the maniac's accusation and assault. She started as she returned her cousin's morning greeting.

'Holy Virgin! Edmund,' she exclaimed, 'how pale and wan you look! Hath this rude maniac disturbed your slumbers also, or have you seen a ghost?'



'My slumbers were indeed disturbed,' he replied, 'my fair cousin, but only by the cries of our fellow-traveller, as I suppose Sir Robert des Lys has told you.'

'Send for a leech, then, dear Edmund,' she said; 'I am sure you are unfit to travel—you look so deathlike!'

'Your leechcraft will be sufficient for me, Cicely; and, far from delaying our departure, I would be at once in the saddle. The pure breeze of heaven will speedily dissipate the vapours of the night. With your leave I will but give some directions to my followers, and we will proceed on our journey.' He left her with her gay companion, and summoning his esquire, commanded him to inquire whether the English peasant whom they had observed three nights before had been seen since. He paced the courtyard of the inn in anxious thought till the shrewd lad returned, and brought an answer in the affirmative, adding that the stranger was, however, gone, having departed at daybreak, and that no one could give any certain intimation of the road he had taken. 'I am sorry that I did not give orders for his apprehension when I first beheld him, Trafford,' said the knight, 'since I recognized him immediately as one of the band of outlaws that plundered the royal baggage when I travelled with the King's Grace from Winchester to London. I would have spared him the punishment he deserves, as he is in a strange land; but I cannot doubt that he was the disturber of the Hospitaller's slumbers last night, doubtless with intent to plunder. 'T is pity he has escaped us, but I thought not of him at the moment, and the recollection has now occurred to me too late. Say nought of the matter, good Richard, lest it alarm the Lady Cicely. Natheless, it behoves us to be wary, and, if an occasion should present itself, to secure the person of this crazed or evil-disposed losel: you will so inform our men,

and bid them watch carefully to prevent any further mischief from his hands.'

'I will do my endeavour to find and seize the villain, Sir Knight,' answered Trafford, 'and he may yet swing on the nearest tree ere we sail for Egypt.'

Edmund rejoined his cousin, and the travellers again set forward on their journey—the French knight still at the lady's bridle-rein, wiling away the tedium of the journey by his gay discourse and gentle courtesies. No traces were discovered of the mysterious visitant to the inn, nor did any incident worthy of remark occur before the party reached the ancient city of Lyons, where the King of France had been joined by the Duke of Burgundy, and still abode; every day bringing fresh reinforcements to the army of the Cross. By the desire of Cicely they halted at a small hostelry near the city, that she might exchange her travelling gear for a dress fit to appear in the presence of the Queen and her ladies; and whilst she completed her task of adornment, her cousin and the Hospitaller lingered in the courtyard of the inn, amusing themselves by watching the arrivals and departures of the crowds of pilgrims, who were all bound, like themselves, for Egypt. A clatter of horses' hoofs and a confusion of loud and eager voices announced the approach of a larger party than had as yet attracted their attention, and the inn yard was speedily filled with a number of men-at-arms, the leader of whom was a man of gigantic proportions, mounted on a strong *palefroi* and clad in complete armour, over which he wore a surcoat of sendal, without any ornament or embroidered arms on it. His countenance bore the impress of a frank and benevolent spirit, and his quick blue eye redeemed its expression from anything like heaviness or vacuity.

The moment he beheld the Hospitaller and his companion,

he sprang from his steed and, advancing towards them, courteously greeted the Hospitaller.

'Sir Auger de Chateaufneuf,' he said, with a smile, 'I am right glad to see you. You bring with you, I trust, one of the essentials to our holy emprise—the contributions of your Commanderies?'

'The Order of the holy St. John is never backward in contributing either its wealth or blood to the great cause of Christ's earthly kingdom, my Lord de Joinville,' answered the Hospitaller. 'I have—even at the peril of my life from robbers and unchristianlike ruffians—brought a heavy sum to the good King from my brethren.'

'I joy to hear it,' said the Seneschal. 'In these busy times we must not marvel that there be rogues abroad, and even joint labourers with us in this war; for ye wot well, Sir Hospitaller, that the net cast into the sea brought up both good fishes and bad, as the priests tell us. But how chances it that I see not Prince Robert with you? Methought when we parted he was to give you the benefit of his escort to Lyons?'

'And so he did, my good lord; though,' he added, meeting Edmund's glance of astonishment, 'it pleased him to forego his rank for a brief space, and style himself the Knight of the Lilies—wherefore I know not.'

'A wild freak,' said the Seneschal, laughing. 'Where taries the royal gallant?'

'The Count is in the auberge, I believe,' replied De Chateaufneuf; 'I have not seen him since we stopped here.'

'Well, we have ridden hard this morning, and my brave fellows will be the better for refreshment; and hark ye, Hugues,' addressing his sergeant, 'give the poor rogues a stoup of good wine to cheer them. 'Tis a sad trial, Sir Knight,' he continued

to Edmund, 'to leave the homes of our childhood perchance for ever. I had not courage to pass my fair castle of Joinville after I had once ridden forth from it; and doubtless they of the meaner sort feel as much at leaving their hamlets or cottages; or perchance more, seeing they have not the high spirit of chivalry that animates the knight and noble to support them.'

'You reason justly, my lord,' replied Fitzwalter; 'and we, younger soldiers of the Cross, who have no castles and defenceless babes to leave behind us, are the happier. Yet numbers of the poorer class press voluntarily into the ranks of the crusaders.'

'Nay, I meant not that they do not share the same spirit of devotion as their noble brethren, but that the trial of bidding farewell to our fair France may be greater for them. The saints forbid that I should disparage the valour or faith of the meanest soldier who buckles on his armour for the Holy Sepulchre! May I ask the name of the gallant knight I address?'

'It is as yet unknown to fame, except that which it derives from my noble ancestors,' replied the young man. 'I am called Edmund Fitzwalter, nephew to the Baron of that name, in whose service I am.'

'An English ally!' exclaimed De Joinville. 'I give you a fair welcome to the Oriflamme, gallant stranger. Come you alone, or is the noble Baron in your company?'

'The good lord my uncle has proceeded by sea to Cyprus, and I was charged with the escort of his daughter, the Lady Cicely, to her Grace the Queen, with whom she is to abide.'

'And the noble Longespée—does he also join us at Cyprus?'

'Either there or at Damietta,' was the reply; 'but probably at Cyprus. The Pope hath given him permission to draw on the English clergy for funds for the crusade; and with him

come also the Bishop of Salisbury, Sir Walter de Lucy, and many other gentlemen of note.'

'A goodly company, by St. Denis! A better followed not the banner of the Cross under Godfrey de Bouillon; and the right holy and valiant monarch who leads this crusade is not inferior to his great predecessor. I serve him with the loyal devotion of the heart, albeit I may not take an oath of allegiance to him, being true vassal to Henry Count of Champagne. But see, mine host comes to summon us to dinner: will you pleasure me by partaking of it?'

They entered the inn, and were speedily engaged in demolishing the substantial pasty, roast pigeons, and cold meat, which the host set before them; in which they were assisted by the Hospitaller and two young knights who had accompanied the Seneschal. The lady dined in her own apartment; the Count d'Artois also did not make his appearance. He had been occupied with matters in which he was deeply interested, during the interview between Fitzwalter and the Seneschal.

The Lady Cicely had scarcely finished dressing before one of her maidens entered the chamber and delivered a message from the French knight, entreating a few moments' audience in private with her. Cicely hesitated, and the colour rushed to her cheeks for a moment; but she almost instantly regained her composure, and desiring the damsel to conduct Sir Robert des Lys to a small antechamber near her own apartment, she proceeded thither herself, with her favourite attendant, to await his coming. If the Count d'Artois had not already acknowledged the superiority of his fair fellow-traveller over the most celebrated beauties of the French Court, he would, without hesitation, have ascribed her the palm as she now stood in her rich attire, that lent a new lustre to her unequalled loveliness.

‘Most gentle lady!’ he exclaimed, ardently; ‘how can I thank you for this condescension? May I pray you, of your goodness, to give me hearing for a few minutes in private? I have something to communicate that is for your ear alone.’

‘You may wait without the apartment, Marian,’ said the lady.—‘And now, Sir Knight, what would you tell me?’

Her manner, as she turned to Artois, was so calm and dignified, that for an instant the proudest knight in Europe—as he was justly called—quailed beneath her glance.

‘I would tell you, lady,’ he said at length, after an embarrassed pause, ‘that which, I fear me, you will be displeased to hear. I have not been able to gaze so long on your beauty, and listen to that voice which might join in the song of angels, without adoring you. Cicely, fairest and gentlest, I love you; do not spurn me—do not reject me, beloved, I implore you!’

He had thrown himself at her feet, and caught her hand. She hastily disengaged it.

‘This is madness, Sir Robert des Lys,’ she said. ‘You forget that I am no errant damsel of romance, but the daughter of one of England’s proudest nobles, and under the protection, at present, of your Queen. This is not language to address to me: my hand is at the disposal of my lord and father, or of my liege lord, King Henry, alone.’

‘Forgive the impatience, lady, that urged me to forestal an application to the noble Baron,’ answered her suitor, earnestly; ‘and in compassion tell me, if I gain his assent, and that of my own Royal liege—who must be consulted likewise on this matter—may I hope for your favour? may I believe that my devotion to you will at length prevail?’

‘It is vain to hope for my father’s consent, Sir Robert,’

replied Cicely, in some confusion. 'The Lord Fitzwalter is ambitious, and I am the only daughter of his house.'

'Nay, if it be so,' said Sir Robert, eagerly, 'I have nought to fear. If your consent, lady, will follow his, I may, in joyful hope, vow myself your true knight. Forgive the deception I have idly practised: it is not a poor knight, with no heritage but his sword, that woos your peerless excellence, but Robert of Artois, the son and brother of a King.'

The effect of his communication on the maiden astonished and terrified her princely lover. She grew suddenly as pale as death, and clasped her small white hands convulsively together. Artois was about to summon her attendant, but with a strong effort she recovered her composure, and detained him.

'Count Robert,' she said, in a voice of forced calmness, 'I know not wherefore it has pleased you to conceal your rank so long, but I think not that the princely estate of my suitor levels the barrier between us; on the contrary, it renders it impassable; for a son of France must wed one of his own station, and the King, your royal brother, would never permit you to choose a bride who was not the daughter of a sovereign prince, or at least of some great vassal of his crown. I thank you for the distinction you have paid me, and I pray you, of your courtesy, let us speak no more on so painful a subject.'

'Nay, Cicely, deem not my love an idle or passing profession; nor king nor brother shall ever gainsay the will of Robert of Artois! For my deceit in allowing you to deem me a poor knight errant, I had a strong reason. When you looked forth on me from your litter, in the streets of Paris, and I beheld your exquisite countenance, I knew not whom you were, but I loved you instantly, and desired De Chateaufort and my followers to conceal my title, and address me only as Robert

des Lys, with the wild hope that I might win your favour, unbiassed by my rank; and then—when you loved me as the simple knight—make you a daughter of the royal house of France. I was wrong, lady; it befitted not one so noble to cast a thought on a suitor she deemed beneath her, and you have justly withheld that precious affection, which I covet as the thirsty pilgrim does the living waters. But let me hope; drive me not to utter despair. Say but that I may try to win your favour—that you do not love another!’

A deep blush suffused the lady’s face.

‘I cannot bid you hope for the fulfilment of so wild a vision,’ she said, ‘nor am I bound to answer your somewhat discourteous question, my Lord of Artois. It is enough, that Cicely Fitzwalter will never wed without her father’s sanction and blessing, and that he who wins her love must be the bravest of those brave men who fight for the Holy Sepulchre.’

‘I understand you, lady,’ cried Artois, passionately; ‘I have a rival in this disinherited lord, this William the Landless, or Longsword, as your islanders call him, and you deem *him* the bravest of the crusaders; but think not he shall win you by superior valour, for I swear by St. Denis that I will cut my way where he shall not dare follow me, and no warrior who wears the Cross shall equal the daring of Robert of Artois, even though the fortune of war prove against me.’

‘I will not deign to answer your rude vehemence, Sir Count,’ said Cicely Fitzwalter, with a lofty scorn, that made her still more beautiful in the eyes of him, who was, nevertheless, angered by it. ‘Courtesy as well becomes a knight as valour, and since my Lord of Artois forgets what is due to my rank and station, and his own character as a gentleman, he will not marvel that I decline further converse with him.’



She moved towards the door, but the impetuous Robert flung himself at her feet, and detained her by grasping her super-tunic.

'Forgive me, lady,' he exclaimed, 'though I do not deserve your pardon after such unmanly violence! I will be meek and gentle, fairest Cicely, as a village maiden, for the future, if you will but pardon me! Speak to me, I implore you!'

'I forgive you, Count Robert,' said the lady, with emotion, 'on condition that you never again resume the subject.'

'Never?—Cruel Cicely! I cannot, then, win forgiveness.'

'Let me pass, my lord.'

'Say but that you forgive my violence. I will promise never to offend again.'

'I forgive you, Prince Robert. Now leave me, or suffer me to pass to my own chamber.'

She extended her hand, which the Prince pressed respectfully to his lips, and then rising, suffered her to leave the anteroom. As soon as the last glimpse of her blue velvet robe had vanished, the hot-headed Artois called his esquire, ordered his charger to be brought, instead of the stout *palefroi* on which he had made the journey, and telling his sergeant to bring on his followers with De Joinville's and the English knight's, sprang into his saddle, and startled the Sieur de Joinville and his companion, by galloping with wild precipitation past the inn window.

'The saints be good to us!' exclaimed the Seneschal, as he recognized in the flying horseman the Count d'Artois; 'what mad freak has Prince Robert taken now? I sometimes think that a spell hath been cast on him, he is so unlike his royal kindred.'

'We have found him a right courteous and merry gentleman,' said Fitzwalter; 'I shall be well satisfied if his royal brothers resemble him.'

'By St. John!' answered the Hospitaller, 'I should be sorry if King Louis had not more courtesy. He is the most insolent and ungovernable——'

'Hold, Sir Hospitaller!' cried the Seneschal, angrily; 'I cannot hear you speak against the Count d'Artois; he is the brother of our Sovereign, and, moreover, a very valiant and noble knight. I shall hold it as a personal affront to myself if you repeat your injurious terms, alike unbecoming your order and the brotherly vow of crusaders.'

The knight muttered a few words of excuse, and left the apartment, and De Joinville, addressing the Englishman, courteously offered to escort him and his charge to the Court of Louis, if the lady were sufficiently rested to proceed. Fitzwalter thanked him, and hastened to Cicely, to inform her of the offer of the brave Seneschal, and inquire if she were able to avail herself of it. He found his cousin pacing her chamber hurriedly, with a flushed cheek and tearful eyes. Edmund had always loved Cicely as a sister, and had ever found her a ready confidante or advocate with his uncle, in the occasional disgraces of his boyhood. He anxiously inquired the cause of her emotion, and in a few brief words she told him of Artois' proposal, and her rejection of it.

'Is it possible, Cicely,' he said, 'that you could so wildly cast fortune from you? It is an alliance worthy of your beauty and your birth. Methinks the good lord, my uncle, will be sorely vexed when he hears that his daughter has refused a son of Louis the Eighth.'

'He need not know it,' replied Cicely, anxiously; 'the Count d'Artois will soon cease to think of me: he is probably as fickle as he is rash and sudden, and from me Lord Fitzwalter will never hear it.'

‘But wherefore reject him, my pretty cousin? He is a well-favoured gallant, and a brave. Can it be that another has gained your favour, or must you be won by romantic exploits of your knight, like the damsel of a *trouveur's* tale?’

‘You jest, Edmund; but indeed I have cause for uneasiness, if you knew the waywardness of my destiny! When we have leisure for it, I will tell you all, but now lead me to this worthy Seneschal.’

De Joinville gazed with admiration on the rare loveliness of the English maiden, and courteously welcomed her to France, assuring her that the Queen had been grieved that her hurried departure from Paris had prevented her receiving her young guest in that city. He placed her with the gentlest care on her palfrey, and rode himself at her bridle-rein, talking to her of England and of her approaching journey, or giving simple but graphic sketches of the Court, of which she was so soon to become a member; and Cicely, charmed with the quaint wit of her new companion, and amused by his animated chat, forgot, for a time, Artois' proposal, and her own consequent vexation.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE LEPER.

Can such things be,  
And overcome us like a summer's cloud,  
Without our special wonder?                      SHAKESPEARE.

**I**T was drawing towards sunset as the Lady Cicely and her escort entered the ancient town of Lyons, now crowded with all classes of people, who thronged the streets, rendering

the approach to the palace slow and difficult. Parties of knights, in bright armour, but wearing plain surcoats and mantles over it, continually passed; now a group of men-at-arms, surrounding some jongleur or minstrel, opened to make way for them; and anon, a crowd of peasants and vagabonds of all sorts and all nations stopped the way, as they stood listening with mute attention to a barefooted Franciscan friar, advocating the cause of crusading, and calling on the rich to open their purses for the sake of the Holy Sepulchre, in a Stentorian voice, and with the earnestness if not the eloquence of the Hermit Peter, or his successors, Bertrand and Fulk. At length, the mansion in which Queen Marguerite and her ladies dwelt was gained, and De Joinville, assisting the maiden to alight from the litter in which she had entered the city, conducted her to the apartments of the lady who officiated as 'mother of the maids' to Marguerite of Provence, in whose kind and courteous care he left her; and then returned to the young Fitzwalter.

'Sir Edmund of England,' he said, 'you had, perhaps, better share my lodging in the town, for I doubt if you could find an auberge with room to receive you; and your followers can be accommodated, as they best may, in different parts of the city; my sergeant shall guide them in their search for quarters.'

'I thank you for your courtesy, my Lord de Joinville,' answered Edmund, 'and will frankly avail myself of it, though, if it stand with your good pleasure, I would prefer seeing something of Lyons before I intrude on your hospitality for the night. I am an untravelled soldier, my good lord, and had but a passing glimpse of the French towns through which we have hitherto passed. I should be shamed at home were I to return without having seen something of the cities of your fair France.'

'T is a natural and commendable wish,' said his new friend. 'One of my pages shall accompany you, and point out all that is best worth your observation. Supper will be ready for you at any hour you please, for we have far outstayed the usual time for it already.'

The evening was worthy of the fair South. The sun set in unclouded majesty, and Edmund—who gladly availed himself of external objects to banish the vulture thought that preyed upon his heart—lingered amidst the novel sights and sounds of the city of the Rhône till night had nearly closed in, in spite of the often-repeated advice of his young companion to return. The page was again representing to his knightly companion the danger of traversing the lonely streets at so late an hour without other companions, when a faint cry of 'Room! room for the leper!' was uttered in a plaintive voice near them, and a wretched being, wrapped in a coarse grey mantle, and wearing a bandage over the lower part of his face and head, approached them, striking the clapper-dish which he held. The page shrank against the buildings, with a murmured prayer to the saints, and the Englishman also drew back with a sensation of loathing. They stood immediately beneath an image of the Virgin, before which burned a lamp, and as the leper turned towards them, repeating his mournful cry, his eyes met those of the English knight, who started, and uttering an exclamation of astonishment, sprang forward, and would have seized on the afflicted object before him, had he not darted suddenly down a dark and narrow lane, and the page, by seizing his arm at the same moment, detained him.

'Hold, in the name of the Virgin, Sir Knight!' exclaimed the boy: 'do you not hear that he is a leper? Beware of touching even his garment, if you would not be subject to the

same loathsome disease. Wherefore would you stay the infected wretch?’

‘He is no leper, but a base impostor and assassin,’ answered the knight, drawing a deep breath, ‘who attacked the good knight De Chateauneuf, and would have traitorously slain him in his sleep. I recognized the villain’s eyes in his foul disguise.’

‘Now, the saints keep us!’ replied the page; ‘I marvel the rogue does not fear that the judgment of Heaven will fall on him, for thus mocking it. I deemed him a leprosy-stricken soldier, on his way to the lazarus-house without the city walls. Wherefore can he have assumed such a disguise?’

‘For some deep villany, I fear,’ said Fitzwalter, gloomily. ‘I would give much to know his object in thus following our steps; but we will homeward with all speed, for if the rogue have accomplices, and return hither, we are scarce equal to cope with them. Thou hast no arms but thy dagger, my fair boy?’

‘No, truly, Sir Knight, and the streets are filled, when night closes in, with those who seldom walk by sunshine; nor can the magistrery prevent it, for it is hard to tell who are rogues and who true men amongst the number who wear the Cross. Down this turning, so please you, sir.’

‘Have you many leprosy-stricken in your country, Sir Page?’ asked Fitzwalter.

‘I would I were not obliged to answer Ay to your question, noble sir,’ replied the page: ‘there are many lepers; but the good knights of St. Lazarus are right careful of them, and there are, I have heard my lord say, two thousand lazarus-houses in France, so that the afflicted wretches are better cared for than they were in the olden times. I never see a leper without

thinking of the tale my good Lord Seneschal's minstrel told us on the eve of the new year.'

'Will it please you to cheer this somewhat dreary walk by repeating it?'

'With pleasure, Sir Knight,' answered the youth, modestly; 'I would, though, you could have heard it from Master Tristram himself. I shall mar it in the telling.'

'Your good-will shall atone for all defects as a *trouveur*, my brave lad. So now for your tale.'

'There dwelt in Normandy, many a long year ago, a knight, who was gifted with all that the saints can bestow. He was well-favoured, brave and noble, and lord of a fair castle, which rivalled the Château Galliard. His lady mother had many waiting gentlewomen, who tended her and wrought beside her at the tapestry-frame, and one of them was so fair, and pure, and gentle, that there was nothing in nature to be compared to her but a queen lily. She was a leech's daughter, and her mother had been of gentle blood; therefore the lady nurtured her delicately, and as she had no daughters of her own, learned to look on Mistress Helen as her child. But the maiden loved her liege lord; and for the love of him the colour fled from her cheek and her soft eyes lost their lustre. The lady discovered the secret cause of Helen's sadness, and, summoning her son, commanded him to wed the orphan she had reared and protected. The knight was brave and noble, but he was prouder than the foul fiend, and he scorned to make the daughter of a poor physician his wife. He answered his mother with contempt, and even insolence, and the lady, who was stern of mood, in the bitterness of her anger cursed him—her first-born. But I weary you, Sir Knight.'

'Not so, I pledge you my word.'

‘Well, the knight heeded not his lady mother’s wrath, but rode forth to his hawking and hunting, and treated the gentle Helen with discourtesy. Before the moon waned, however, the lady’s curse was accomplished, for her only son—he who had been the pride and joy of her existence—became a leper. They drove him forth from his stately home, and there was then no lazar-house to receive and shelter him. His haughty mother, who deemed it was her curse that had brought this judgment on his head, sickened of grief and remorse, and died, and the next heir, who was a churl and a miser, took Sir Amiloun’s fair heritage, and refused its former owner even an alms. The leper knight found a deserted lodge by the way-side, and dwelt in it, subsisting on the alms of the charitable. He had not thus lived long alone, before a boy, in the garb of a page, came to him, and, in spite of the knight’s warnings and entreaties, insisted on remaining and tending him. Sir Amiloun would fain have persuaded him to leave him, for he dreaded infecting the fair child with his disease; but the boy would not hearken to his entreaties: he had, he said, eaten of the knight’s bread and drunk of his cup in other days, and he would not desert him in his hour of need. Sir Amiloun thought that young face was familiar to him, though he could not remember him amongst the pages of his former household; but as he had been much from home, and had little heeded the boyish aspirants to chivalry who dwelt in his castle, he believed the child’s tale. For three years they abode in that lonely lodge by the way-side, and the page, who was wondrously skilled in leechcraft, did much to mitigate the painful suffering of the leper; and oftentimes went forth, and, by singing to his gittern, obtained wherewithal to purchase dainty food for the beggared knight. At length he proposed journeying to the nearest



towns, that his skill might win a larger recompense than that bestowed by the chance passers-by, and his unhappy master consented : they parted ; and days and months passed, and the page returned not. Sir Amiloun deemed that he should behold him no more ; when one day, as he sat by the way-side to collect a miserable alms, he beheld his faithful attendant approaching him. The boy's garments were all in rags, and his delicate feet, which were shoeless, were blistered and cut by the roughness of the way that he had travelled ; but when he saw his lord, he lifted up his hands to heaven, and shed tears of joy and gratitude.

“Where hast thou been, mine only and true friend?” said the leper. “It is many a weary day since we parted.”

“My lord,” said the page, bending low before him, “I have been to seek, and I bring the means of restoring you to health. Look at these flagons, my heavy but delightful burden for many a mile. They contain a precious and blessed water, that hath power to heal the leper !”

“And who art thou, my matchless and wondrous friend?” asked Sir Amiloun. “Art thou a mortal, or the angel who presided at my birth?”

“I am no angel, but a woman,” answered his former companion. “Could you not, Sir Amiloun, recognize beneath the guise of a page the orphan Helen? Think not,” she continued, “that I wish to intrude myself upon your compassion, when, as you surely shall be, you are restored to health. I had been reared at your lady mother's cost, and I could not, without ingratitude worse than impious, desert her son. A holy palmer told me of these healing waters, and I have travelled far and encountered many perils to obtain them. Wash in them, and be clean, my good lord. In her cloistered cell, the poor Helen

will pray that the future years of your life may be happy and prosperous."

'She turned to depart, but the knight caught her garment, and detained her.

"Stay, my preserver! my true and gentle love!" he said. "Restored health, and life, and honour, I now value not, without thee! Helen, I own my punishment was just, for scorning one so loved and gifted of Heaven. Whether my future days are spent a leper in a lonely lodge, or the proud lord of a castle, thou shalt—an thou wilt—share them with me."

'But the maiden fabled not: the healing waters wrought the cure of the leper, and he went forth amongst his fellow-men again a stalwart knight. The story of the maiden's truth, and of the miraculous cure of the stricken warrior, reached the ears of the king, and the churlish heir was made restore Sir Amiloun's inheritance. Tristram, the minstrel, further added that, in gratitude for the marvel the saints had wrought for him, the knight founded the first lazarus-house in France, on the spot where the old lodge stood, five miles from his own castle, where he had dwelt an outcast and a beggar.'

'A right touching romaunt, Sir Page,' said Edmund Fitzwalter, 'and told as well as if thou wert a minstrel by vocation.'

'Dost think, Sir Knight, that there are waters of such strange healing power?' asked the boy.

'Of a truth, I know not,' replied the knight. "'T is passing strange that other lepers seek them not, if they be of such virtue; but I have heard a Saxon legend of a prince—whose barbarous name I cannot remember—being healed by following some swine into certain waters in our English county of Somerset.'

'I would fain think it true,' said the page; 'but surely

there liveth not a lady now, so true and good as the gentle Helen.'

'Fie on thee, Sir Boy!' said Edmund; 'art thou, so young, an infidel in woman's virtue? There lingereth yet, perchance, a Helen on the earth, if events should try her truth in a like manner. Methinks I know such a lady.'

'I would make a pilgrimage to the world's end, barefooted, to see her,' cried the youth, enthusiastically. 'Fair Mistress Bertha, my lord's niece, hath wrought a piece of tapestry, on which is depicted the return of the Lady Helen. The leper knight is seated on a stone by the way-side, clad in his grey mantle and skull-cap; beside him lie his wallet and clapper-dish. He is gazing in mute wonder on the mock page, and, albeit bent with weakness and disease, you may see he is a gallant gentleman. And the Lady Helen, standing with her fair locks falling on her shoulders, her page's dress all torn and dishevelled, and her delicate white feet without shoe or sandal, looks like an angel in disguise. 'T is a pretty picture, Sir Knight.—But who are these soldiers coming towards us?'

As the men-at-arms approached, Fitzwalter recognized his trusty squire, Richard Trafford, with five or six of his own followers.

'You are well met, Sir Knight,' said the young squire, hastily; 'we have been in search of you. The villain with the bright brown eyes, who well-nigh choked the Hospitaller, is in Lyons.'

'Where did you see him, Trafford? and wherefore did you not secure him?' asked his young lord, eagerly.

'Marry! Sir Edmund, the rogue was too quick for me. I was in search of a lodging for some of the men-at-arms, and nearly in despair of finding one, for all the auberges are full, when, on entering a small lonely hostel, in a bye-lane of the

city, who should I see seated at a table, drinking and eating lustily, but the sturdy Saxon knave. I instantly left the kitchen to call in my men-at-arms and make the villain prisoner; but though I went no farther than the doorway, when I turned back he was gone. We searched every chamber of the inn, and the back court, but the Saxon, or sorcerer, was nowhere visible: the only living being we saw was a leper, and at the sound of his clapper-dish we retreated full quickly. I resolved on seeking you immediately, Sir Knight, and telling you of this mysterious appearance and disappearance; for, by my faith, I think there is art magic in the matter.'

'There is art roguery in it,' said Fitzwalter, impatiently; 'the leper you beheld was the same villain, in a disguise, as I saw with mine own eyes, a brief space ago. Why did you not first seize the ruffian, Master Richard, and then call in your men?'

'He was well armed, so please you,' answered Trafford, 'and I deem a blow from his fist alone would fell an ox. I had but my small dagger for carving with me, and that was no match for his gisarme.'

'There must have been connivance on the part of the host,' said the knight; 'I will have the matter thoroughly inquired into to-morrow, and will inform Sir Auger de Chateaneuf that his foe is near at hand.'

'Yonder is my lord's dwelling, Sir Edmund,' interrupted the page; 'will it please you enter? Worthy Master Trafford, will you follow your lord?'

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## JOHN O' THE MILL.

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough hew them how we will.

Give me your pardon, sir: I have done you wrong;  
But pardon it, as you are a gentleman.

SHAKESPEARE.

**A**T an early hour the ensuing day, the Seneschal of Champagne summoned his English guest to attend him to the mansion where Louis the Ninth held his Court.

'You need not don your bravery, Sir Knight,' he added, 'as the knights of Burgundy ever do, for our good King, since he took the Cross, hath laid aside the rich vestments in which he once delighted, and weareth the simple garb of a pilgrim. I ween (with the exception of Count Robert's) there is not an embroidered surcoat amongst our French knights.'

The crusaders found the Royal Leader of their enterprise surrounded by a brilliant circle of the united chivalry of many lands. In it were the Duke of Burgundy and his knights, whose splendour of attire and refinement of manner already gave promise of that Court, which many years after exceeded every other in Europe in civilization and chivalrous courtesy; the Count de Soissons, the Earls of Flanders and Brittany, the noble Count de St. Pol, and the royal brothers of the French monarch, the Counts of Poitiers, Anjou, and Artois. Clad in a loose black mantle, without border of ermine or embroidered arms, the majestic Louis was still easily distinguished from his allies and vassals by the kingly dignity of his bearing; and as Fitzwalter

gazed on him with intense interest, he could have almost believed that the grave had given back its illustrious dead, and that he\* who had won the holy crown his deep humility forbade him to wear, was before him. As the Seneschal made his way, followed by the English knight, towards the monarch, Louis caught sight of him, and an expression of pleasure instantly lighted up his noble features.

'Ha! our brave De Joinville!' he exclaimed. 'Right welcome, gallant Seneschal! We had begun to fear that you were not able to persuade yourself to leave your fair castle, and that we should lack your good sword in the East.'

'Nay, then, my lord King,' said the warrior, frankly, 'you did me foul wrong! I have eschewed even the sight of my pleasant home, that I might go the more willingly where honour calls me. I would not have injured your Grace by a like doubt.'

'Your pardon, my brave friend,' said Louis, with a smile; 'we did but jest with you. Your truth and devotion to the holy cause we may not doubt. What fair gentleman do you bring with you, Sir Seneschal? His favour, though a noble one, is unknown to us.'

'Allow me to present to your Grace, Sir Edmund Fitzwalter of England, one of the brave band of gallant gentlemen who accompany William Longespée to Egypt.'

'You are welcome, young sir,' said the King, graciously; 'we gladly hail every new labourer in the vineyard. Does the bold Earl join us at Cyprus?'

'He does, my lord King, accompanied by the Baron Fitzwalter, mine honoured uncle; the brave knight Sir Walter de

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\* Godfrey de Bouillon.

Lucy, and many others of my countrymen, who are ambitious of following so distinguished a leader as King Louis.'

'Their names are well known to the infidel Paynim. I would that my royal brother of England would unite the banner of St. George with that of St. Denis; I should then deem our forces irresistible. Does his Grace still continue averse to Eastern warfare?'

'It becomes not a simple knight to judge of the inclinations or purposes of a great King,' replied Edmund; 'but if report speak truly, sire, Henry of Winchester will never assume the Cross.'

'His Holiness the Pope hath written to him, urging his Grace to strike a blow for Christendom. I must hope that the Holy Father will, in the end, prevail; meanwhile, any of England's brave subjects shall be welcome.'

Edmund bowed his acknowledgments, and drew back into the circle; as he did so, he met the eye of the Count d'Artois, and bowed. His salutation was returned, but with so much haughtiness, that the colour rushed to the brow of the Englishman, and he regretted his own act of courtesy.

'The misproud fool!' he thought, 'it is Cicely's rejection of his suit that causes this insolent contempt. By my faith, I am glad the wench rejected him; 't was a wholesome lesson for his vanity.'

A touch on the arm roused him from his reverie, and looking up, he beheld the Knight of St. John beside him.

'How fare you, fellow-traveller?' said the Hospitaller. 'Never look so dark and lowering at yonder proud prince's insolence; you are not the first to feel his contemptuous disdain. Ah! you did not think, I see, that any had heeded it but yourself, but I did, and noticed it directly to the Count de Soissons: Look you, my lord Count, said I——'

It is certainly not pleasant to be treated with insolence, even when no one witnesses the insult ; but one is doubly aggrieved when other eyes and ears besides one's own are spectators and hearers of it ; nor does wounded vanity permit us to feel very grateful to those who force the disagreeable circumstance on our notice. Edmund Fitzwalter, at that moment, hated the Hospitaller almost as much as he did the Count d'Artois, and hastened to interrupt his harangue.

'I am never insulted with impunity, Sir Knight,' he said, haughtily. 'But a truce to such folly. I wished to see you, Sir Auger, to inform you, that the villain who attempted your life on our journey has been seen in Lyons.'

'Holy St. John !' exclaimed the Hospitaller, turning pale ; 'you do not say so, Sir Edmund ? How could a maniac have followed us so many miles ?'

'Nay, I know not,' said Fitzwalter, carelessly ; 'there is oft-times much method in madness, and when lunatics take an antipathy, as this one doubtless has to you, they are indefatigably malicious.'

'My dear Fitzwalter, my very good friend,' said the alarmed De Chateauneuf, 'what would you advise me to do ? I fear no man in his senses. But a maniac—one would be scarce justified in slaying him, you know.'

'I know nothing of the kind,' returned Edmund ; 'did the wretch cross my own path, I would slay him with as little remorse as I would a venomous serpent or wild beast ; however, you will use your pleasure, Sir Auger : I have given you timely warning. You would doubtless recognize him again ?'

'By the saints, I fear not,' said Sir Auger, in a doleful tone ; 'I was so alarmed—I mean so startled—when he woke me from my sleep, that I scarce took note of him ; but he was a stalwart



knave, as tall as Sir Goliath in the mystery, and his fingers were like an iron vice. His eyes, too, glared upon me like a fiend's— and now I bethink me, they were round and brown as a hazel nut.'

'T is the same villain, without a doubt, that my esquire met yester-eve. Be on your guard, Sir Auger.'

And satisfied with the punishment he had inflicted on his friendly tormentor by means of his fears, Edmund turned from the knight.

'How strange,' he thought, 'to find a coward in the number of the bravest order of Christian knights! but the poor caitiff is probably useful in discharging the milder duties of his Order. However, his fear for his own safety will make him a dangerous and inveterate foe to my enemy, for such my heart tells me the leper is.—And do I, Edmund Fitzwalter, fear this unknown peasant? No, not his power of slaying me—assassin-like—but the possibility of his exposing me to dishonour and obloquy. Oh, bitter punishment of crime! that can level the loftiest spirit with such a one as yonder infirm and timid soul.'

'Are you ready to wend your way homewards, Sir Edmund Fitzwalter?' asked the Seneschal. 'It is near his Majesty's hour of dinner, and the presence-chamber is thinning rapidly.'

'I am at your disposal, my good lord,' said the Englishman, rousing himself; 'I will walk, stand, or sit, at your pleasure.'

'Then I pray you pleasure me by being of a more cheerful countenance: your brow is as stern and sad as if you had come from the presence of your judge, after he had passed sentence of death on you, rather than from the Court of our good King Louis! Fie, young gentleman—at your age, you should not know what care is! Be of better cheer, I pray you.'

Fitzwalter replied with a smile to this good-humoured chiding,

'That his countrymen could not boast of the *gaieté de cœur* of the French knights, but that he hoped to acquire a more lively manner from communion with them.'

'What! are you all so stern and sad-browed?' said his worthy host. 'It must be the nature of your island air, surely, to render the light spirits sluggish. Our allies of Brittany are a gloomy race, though brave and skilful warriors, and *they* ascribe it to their island origin.'

'It may be so,' replied Edmund, 'but I trust the sun of Syria will warm our frozen spirits. We do not fight the less bravely that we are stern of mood.'

They had gained the street thus discoursing, when, as a gay group of cavaliers opened to permit them to pass, the Count d'Artois stepped forth from them, and accosted Sir Edmund.

'Your pardon, Sir Knight,' he said, with the same assumption of haughtiness that had marked his previous salutation; 'but is your present abode at the Sieur de Joinville's?'

'It is, my lord,' replied Fitzwalter, as coldly and proudly.

'Then I will do myself the honour of waiting on you there. I have matter for your private ear.'

Edmund was about to express his readiness to receive the proffered visit, when a sudden pressure of the crowd of galants nearly threw him on the prince's shoulder. He turned in sudden anger at the discourtesy, when it was explained by the sound of a clapper-dish, and the same cry that had greeted him the night before, 'Room for the leper! room!' He could not mistake the gigantic figure and slight Saxon accent, and exclaiming, 'Help, gentlemen, in the name of the Virgin! help! secure the villain!' was springing forward, when Artois detained him with a grasp of iron.

'Why,' he asked, fixing his falcon eye on the disturbed coun-

tenance of the knight, 'why would you seize a wretch contaminated by a foul disease? You are surely distraught to run into such-peril, Sir Edmund.'

'He is no leper, Count Robert,' cried Edmund, impetuously, 'but an impostor and an assassin. 'T is the villain who would have slain De Chateauneuf.'

'*In mistake, perchance,*' said the Prince, emphatically. 'I thought you believed his foe was a maniac, Sir Edmund?'

'At the time I did; I have since had reason to change my opinion,' replied Fitzwalter, proudly; 'but I can no longer tarry to be catechised, my lord: the fellow has escaped, and the Sieur de Joinville awaits me yonder.'

He found the Seneschal in a fit of anger at the unexpected appearance of a leper in the crowded streets of Lyons.

'We shall carry the foul plague with us to Syria, where it is already only too rife,' he said, 'if these wretched objects are allowed to mix with our soldiers. I have sent one of my own fellows, who fears not the plague itself, to see that the unhappy rogue quits the town, and goes to the lazar-house forthwith. And now let us home to dinner.'

The noon-tide meal was finished, and Edmund Fitzwalter withdrew to his own apartment. For several minutes he paced its narrow confines with a hurried step and perturbed countenance. On the entrance of Richard Trafford, he regained his composure.

'You are come in good time, Richard,' he said, 'I have need of your services. The Sieur de Joinville told me, but now, that he had desired one of his attendants to follow the false leper you saw last night, and see that he goes direct to the lazar-house. Find me out the man who went on this errand, my good youth, and learn from him the route the villain took ;

but do not appear anxious about the matter, Richard, nor hint that it is by my desire you question him, for the rogue must have allies in the city, or he would not thus venture forth in the face of day—and we know not who they are.'

The squire promised obedience and caution, and about an hour before sunset, in consequence of intelligence gleaned from De Joinville's retainer, Sir Edmund Fitzwalter, well armed, left the city of Lyons by its eastern gate, and plunged into the thick wood which then fringed the banks of the Rhône. There was a red spot upon his cheek and a wild light in his eye, as he glanced eagerly down each path and avenue of the wood; and he drew his breath quickly at every rustle of the leaves or noise of the wild animals that occasionally bounded across his path. At length he paused, and with cautious and stealthy steps approached a thicket, which shelved down towards the river. The sound that drew him thither was an old Saxon air, whistled by some loiterer within its shelter. Gazing anxiously through the trees, Fitzwalter beheld, as he had anticipated, the object of his quest seated at the foot of an old chestnut tree. He still wore the leper's garb of grey, but the mantle was partially flung aside, and displayed a powerful and athletic figure. His cap and the bandage which had been removed from his mouth lay beside him, and his thick curling hair and embrowned but healthy complexion completely belied the garb he had assumed. The knight had no sooner convinced himself that the peasant before him was really the same who had dogged him through France with such untiring perseverance, than, bursting through the leafy screen, he suddenly confronted him. Surprised and startled, the yeoman sprang to his feet, making an effort to draw his disguise round him, and commencing his warning cry; but the knight sternly interrupted it.

'Hold thy peace, knave or fool!' he said, 'and mock not Heaven by thy lying howl! Who art thou, and wherefore dost thou follow me? Speak, villain!'

The expression of the peasant's countenance changed to anger and fierce hatred, as he replied, 'I am a vassal of Leighton. The blood of my master's son—the dead love of my youth—demand the vengeance I seek on thee.'

And springing suddenly forward as he spoke, he aimed a blow at the knight's helmet with a gisarme which he drew from beneath his mantle. Had not Fitzwalter recoiled a step at his words the stroke would probably have been fatal, so powerful was the arm that directed the weapon; as it was, it bruised the tempered steel helmet, and made its wearer totter for a moment. But instantly recovering himself, the knight drew his sword and rushed on his assailant, exclaiming,

'Ha, by St. George! Darest thou attack a knight, base hound? Thou deservest the death thou shalt meet!'

But unequal as the combat was—for the practised soldier was in complete armour, and the peasant had but his buff jerkin for defence—it lasted much longer than Fitzwalter anticipated. Rage and the thirst for revenge gave courage to the miller of Leighton—for it was he who thus sought to do justice on Alinor's destroyer—and his vigorous, though unskilful assault, put the skill and prowess of his knightly antagonist to a severer test than many a foe of equal rank with himself might have done. And the blood of the noble Fitzwalter flowed, ere the churl lay, disarmed and wounded, before him. Throwing aside his blood-stained sword, the knight then drew the short dagger, worn for the purpose of dispatching a fallen foe, and bent over his prostrate antagonist, with glaring eyes, but pale and quivering lips.

'Speak, slave, ere thou diest,' he said, in a low, hissing tone. 'Who taught thee the base slander thou didst breathe but now?'

'Dost think,' gasped the dying miller—for his life-blood was staining the green sward—'dost think I will tell thee?—No!—Live on, false knight, but live in hourly fear! Know, that the sea could not hide thy secret: from the thick wood—from the snow-pile,—blood cries to God for vengeance, and will have justice. The noble Robert of France——' His words, uttered with difficulty, had been from the first indistinct, and now became inarticulate. Fitzwalter bent lower, with anxious eagerness, to listen, but a low deep groan only followed, and in it John Miller breathed forth his bold English spirit. With a muttered oath the knight arose, and for some minutes stood gazing on the corpse. The dying man's words were not all intelligible to him, for Fitzwalter had yet to learn that Alinor had perished in the snow-storm; but he had heard enough to know that his crime had been revealed—how or by whom he had no means of learning. Had the sea restored the sole witness of the deed of blood? He felt, at that moment even, that the life of daily and hourly fear—the most unendurable of all states of existence—which he had already partially suffered, was to be his for ever; for he could never know to whom the slain peasant might have revealed his secret. His unfinished sentence implied that it was known to the Count of Artois, and the fear of exposure, of a dishonoured name, worse than the fear of death, struck a deadly chill to the knight's heart as he stood looking on the dead.

A noise from the wood recalled his stunned faculties, and hastily raising the corpse, he enveloped it in the grey mantle, and bearing it to the river's brink, plunged it into the stream. He listened with a shudder to the plash it made as it sank, and

then cast his eyes anxiously around to ascertain if any human eye had witnessed the deed. No one was near. The birds sang sweetly (though unheard by him) on the boughs around the fatal spot, and the glorious sunset lighted with its rich glad beauty the glittering leaves. All was as calm, as gay, and beautiful, as if the fair world were undefiled by crime. And then he turned to the swift river, whose bosom had been polluted by a dark stain for a moment, as the corse sank in it, but now its waters rolled on, bright and clear as before, and nothing remained to tell of violence and death, except the blood on the grassy sod, and the clapper-dish of the supposed leper. Not without repugnance Fitzwalter raised the dish from the ground, and committed it also to the river.

He then turned to quit the wood, and without encountering any one, reached, as the day was closing, the Seneschal's house.



## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE DUEL IN THE WOOD.

There I throw my gage,  
Disclaiming here the kindred of a king,  
And lay aside my high blood's royalty.

SHAKSPEARE.

**A** PREY to the most torturing reflections, Edmund Fitzwalter paced his chamber with hurried steps, after he had laid aside his armour, and himself dressed the slight hurts he had received. The yeoman's last words, 'the noble Robert of

France——' still rang in his ears. If the prince were really acquainted with the chief event of his past life, the sudden and insulting haughtiness of his manner was fully explained. But would the prince give credence to the assertions of a peasant, unless borne out by incontestable proofs? and had the dead man possessed means, unknown to Fitzwalter, of establishing the truth of his accusation? It was all a mystery at present, but Sir Edmund inwardly resolved to guard as much as might be against the threatening evil. His plan for so doing was rapidly formed, and he then summoned Richard Trafford to his presence. The summons was quickly obeyed, for the squire's curiosity had been greatly excited by his master's evident interest in the leper, and by his refusal to permit the youth's attendance when he left the house in pursuit of him. He trusted to his own quickness and penetration for its gratification, however, as his young lord rarely conversed with him; and inquiry or comment on his actions would, Trafford well knew, meet with a sharp rebuke; but he found the haughty knight unusually condescending and communicative.

'I have had a walk to little purpose, Richard,' he said, as the youth entered: 'the leper was no impostor after all, but has (as I have ascertained) obtained admission into the lazaretto beyond the forest. I met with a priest near the gates, and on communicating my purpose of following and discovering a supposed impostor in such a garb, I learned from him that the poor rogue had, in very truth, been admitted within the lazaretto. So we will think no more of the matter, Richard,' he continued; 'I should have liked to bring the Saxon caitiff to justice, but as the task might now be troublesome, I shall e'en allow Sir Auger to use his own wits for his protection.'

The youth bowed, not without secretly marvelling that his



haughty master should have so long interested himself in the matter, and with a shrewd suspicion that he had other views in securing the leper than regard for the safety of the Hospitaller.

'And now, my trusty squire,' said the knight, 'thou must forthwith hie thee to Queen Marguerite's palace, and get speech of the Lady Cicely's page. Bid him commend me to his fair mistress, and pray her to grant me an early interview to-night, or to-morrow morning, as may best suit her leisure. Thou wilt bring me her answer with all speed.'

During the young Trafford's absence the knight called for wine, and drank long and eagerly of it.

'I am like a fly in a spider's web at present,' he thought, 'but I will speedily break the meshes and free myself when I can clearly see them. 'T was a great error to let the ruffian Dickon live, knowing I was in his power; but he was a serviceable villain, and I deemed his silence might be bought by gold. The wretch who lies in the Rhône was of another nature—men take not gold in lieu of their revenge. Poor Alinor! But why should I let the thought of *her* damp my spirit? I should rather hate the fair face that has wrought, it may be, my eternal ruin. By my faith! I doubt there was witchcraft in the matter, for how else—loving Constance de Lingard as I did and do—could Alinor have won me to such a deed of folly as the bearing her from Leighton? And then the blind confidence of my rival, who came at an unknown's bidding to the lonely wood, tempting me to remove him from my path by the apparent impossibility of discovery, and the betrayal of my secret crime by means of that vile necromancer's instrument! I shall become a firm believer in art magic in time if I reflect more on it, for there is manifest devilry in the matter.' And he again raised the wine-cup to his lips.

He had spent some twenty minutes in silent reflection ere Trafford returned, bearing the lady's answer. 'She would see her cousin the next morning as early as it pleased him to visit the palace; that evening she was in attendance on her royal mistress, and it might be late before Marguerite dismissed her.' With this reply Fitzwalter was compelled to be satisfied, and employed his squire and two attendants in cleaning and polishing his armour till late into the night, that he might delay as long as possible the now doubly-dreaded hours of sleep.

At an hour when a lady of similar station in the present age would be still hushed in slumber, the fair attendant of the Queen of France received her cousin in the chamber appropriated to her own use. Two attendants were seated at their tapestry-frames in a distant corner of the room, and Cicely herself was not idle, being busily employed sorting skeins of many-coloured silk and gold thread.

'You are welcome, my good cousin,' she said, smilingly, extending her hand to him. 'It was scarce kind to absent yourself so long from your poor kinswoman in this strange city.'

'I could not in courtesy leave my brave host the Sieur de Joinville till yester-eve, dear Cicely,' he answered. 'Had you required my services, I felt confident you would have sent for me. And how like you your new abode, and your royal protectress?'

'Much, very much, Edmund! Queen Marguerite is the gentlest and sweetest of ladies.'

'Does she resemble our own royal lady, her sister?'

'Not much, I think, even in features, and not at all in character. I doubt if Queen Eleanor loves anything or body as well as she does the yellow gold and her own ease and pleasure.'

Marguerite of Provence, on the contrary, is of a most unselfish and loving nature.'

'I rejoice at it for your sake, Cicely. But, dearest cousin,' he added, in a whisper, 'dismiss your damsels; I wish to speak with you alone.'

'You can take your work into my bed-chamber, my good wenches,' said Cicely; then, as her orders were obeyed, she turned with some curiosity to Fitzwalter—'Now, Edmund, I wait your confidence.'

'My cousin,' he answered, seating himself beside her, and gently taking her hand in his own, 'we have been reared beneath the same roof, played beneath the same green tree, and have loved each other as brother and sister rather than as cousins. Is it not so, Cicely?'

'Surely, yes,' she said, with surprise; 'but to what does all this tend?'

'I would ask you, therefore, if you will do me a favour, without seeking to know my motive for asking it?'

'Why, ay, if it suit me, and it is nothing dreadfully tantalizing to my womanly curiosity.'

'T is but a slight request to make you, my loveliest cousin. I would have you smile on the Count d'Artois for my sake.'

'How, Edmund, for your sake? Methought you liked him not?'

'Nor do I, Cicely. I would not have you really favour his suit, but endure it without entirely discouraging it——'

'In short, play the coquette to pleasure you,' interrupted the lady. 'I have but one objection to obliging you, and that is, lest my worthy lord and father should insist on my turning sport into earnest and becoming Countess of Artois, a consummation I should greatly dread.'

‘May I inquire why my once ambitious cousin scorns a princely coronet—an alliance with the descendant of kings?’

‘Because I like him not,’ replied Cicely, with a slight frown. ‘It is enough for you to know, Edmund, that voluntarily I never wed Robert of Artois. I have already told him my hand shall reward the bravest knight who couches his lance for Christendom, and I will not go from my resolution.’

‘And you are, of course, yourself to decide the difficult question of who is bravest, where all are brave—if you have not already made your decision, my fair cousin,’ said the knight, ironically. ‘This makes the favour I ask of you still easier. My Lord Fitzwalter cannot in honour oppose so chivalrous a sentiment of yours (albeit, he may mentally resolve that the suitor *he* favours shall be the bravest knight who is to win the fairest damsel); yet whatever gentle encouragement you bestow on Count Robert may be disavowed right easily at the end of the crusade by your reverence for your vow.’

The lady laughed.

‘Well and craftily urged,’ she said; ‘and, cousin mine, I have no objection to aid your purpose, whatever it be, on one condition.’

‘Name it, sweet Cicely.’

‘That you pledge me your honour to aid *me* at any time that I may call for your assistance, and under all circumstances, whether it be to rid me of a rejected suitor or to speed the suit of a favoured one.’

‘In all things I will be the creature of your will, sweet cousin!’

‘Then the Count d’Artois shall be received with smiles to-day, and with all the encouragement I may with propriety bestow. Will that satisfy you?’

'A thousand thanks, dear Cicely.'

'I must not ask why I am to play this part, Edmund? Nay, then I will restrain my curiosity, since you desire it. But how if this false kindness mislead the prince, and make him unhappy hereafter?'

The smile of satisfaction that lingered for a moment on the handsome Fitzwalter's lip showed that the Count d'Artois' suffering would cause him no regret.

'Believe me, Cicely,' he said, 'Count Robert is of too light and inconstant a spirit to be greatly distressed by the loss of a lady's love. The next fair face will efface the transient impression; therefore, fear not for him.'

'Well, be it then as you will, and remember your pledge to myself. Have you aught else to confide to me?'

He replied in the negative, and the lady recalled her damsels; but the knight lingered still, and beguiled the time by gay converse and courtly flatteries till the hour of dinner obliged him to depart.

His first inquiry on entering the Seneschal's hospitable abode was 'whether the Count d'Artois had called during his absence?' Richard Trafford hastened to reply in the affirmative. The prince, he said, had been much vexed at not finding Sir Edmund, but had desired him to tell his master that he would be with him at three o'clock, to speak with him on an affair of much moment.'

Fitzwalter smiled with silent triumph as he reflected how different would be the Count's mood after the interview he would have had in the interim with the Lady Cicely. It was certain that she would meet him in the Queen's apartment at noon, and bestow on him the false smiles and encouragement she had promised; and Edward felt assured that the enthralled prince

would be but little disposed afterwards to seek or to prosecute a quarrel with her near and favourite kinsman.

Nor did the crafty plotter err. Three o'clock brought the Count d'Artois to his lodging, and though stern and stately, he wore an air of courtesy. Fitzwalter greeted him, and invited him to be seated, but the offer was rejected. Count Robert continued standing, leaning lightly upon his sword.

'Sir Edmund of England,' he said, 'I am about to call your attention to a very singular circumstance, and I pray you not to esteem me discourteous for my intrusion on your privacy. I had hoped to have secured the presence of one who could have better explained the purport of my visit than I can myself, but he is so long past the hour of his appointed attendance, that I begin to have still greater doubts than I at first entertained of the truth of his extraordinary statement.'

He paused; Fitzwalter only bowed.

'On the afternoon of our arrival near Lyons,' continued Count Robert, with some embarrassment, 'you may remember I preceded you, alone and at speed, for certain reasons of a private nature. I had nearly gained the city, when a man threw himself directly before me, calling on me for the honour of knighthood and the love of the Virgin to hear him. His desperate action (he was immediately beneath my horse's hoofs) excited my curiosity; I reined in my steed, and asked him what was his errand to me. "To save the army of the Cross from the pollution of a murderer's presence," he answered; "to urge you by your chivalrous vow of knighthood to bring a guilty and false traitor to justice!" I bade him follow me to the city, and on entering my lodging, charged him to explain his words. The substance of his tale was, that you—Sir Edmund Fitzwalter—had treacherously slain your trusting friend and com

rade, an English knight, and that you were unworthy to associate with gentlemen and men of honour.'

'And did you credit the calumny, my Lord of Artois?' asked Edmund, indignantly, though the paleness of death was on his countenance.

'Not entirely,' was the reply. 'I questioned the churl as to his reason for thus accusing you, thinking he had been, perchance, a faithful follower of the slain knight. He answered that you had carried off his betrothed bride, and that the unhappy maiden had been found dead in the snow some months after, outside her father's threshold. As regarded the peasant girl,' continued the prince, with a slightly contemptuous manner, 'of course he claimed no redress from me—*that* was due alone to her liege lord; but he acknowledged that he sought to satisfy his revenge by proffering the graver charge of murder against yourself, and he offered to establish the solemn truth of his words before the King by undeniable proof if I would afford him my protection and countenance. He confessed that he had attempted the life of De Chateauneuf, believing that the sleeper was yourself; and that being fearful of your recognizing him—as you had often before seen him—and that you might be on your guard against him, he meant to assume a disguise till he could publicly accuse you.'

'And you believed a wretch who confessed having attempted a secret murder, my Lord of Artois!' said Edmund, scornfully; 'I must be allowed to wonder at your credulity.'

'Nay, but,' replied Artois, colouring with restrained anger, 'I allow that his statement gave rise to unpleasant suspicions in my mind, which, doubtless, were manifest in my demeanour towards you, Sir Knight; but the rogue looked honest, and so boldly avowed his attempt at taking the execution of justice

into his own hands, and his resolution to do so altogether if the crusaders refused it, that I could scarcely doubt him. I told him I should communicate with you on the subject, and bade him be with me at sunrise to-day; but I have not yet seen him.'

'And probably never will,' said Fitzwalter, calmly; 'this same honest Saxon being one of our forest outlaws, a base thief, who hath sworn vengeance against me for having had him soundly whipped some time since. I know not what could have suggested such a calumny to him, unless it were the unhappy fate of my deeply deplored and beloved fellow-soldier, Sir Edward Pauncefort.'

'That was the name he mentioned,' exclaimed the Count, hastily. 'Would it be taxing your courtesy too much to crave of you what the truth of the case really is?'

Edmund briefly and coldly stated the circumstance of the Oxford murder. The prince coloured deeply, and bit his lip as he listened.

'The rogue invented a cunning lie,' he said, 'for the chief incidents of the tragedy were the same; only he substituted *you* for the murderer; and i'faith, he succeeded in making me his dupe, and unluckily holds my promise to get him a hearing from the King's Grace. But he has failed in his hour to-day, and if it really be, as I now believe, a calumny, we shall probably, as you say, see him no more.'

'It may be so,' answered Edmund, haughtily; 'but having now, I trust, established the belief of mine innocence in your mind, I must beseech you, Sir Count, to remember that your doubts of my honour are an injury that can be atoned for only in one manner. There lies my glove.'

He threw his gauntlet, which lay on the table between them,



heavily to the ground, but with the same calm, cold manner he had preserved through the interview.

D'Artois raised it, with a deep flush on his brow.

'I cannot, with honour, refuse to accept your challenge, Sir Edmund,' he said, 'but we will, with your permission, tarry a day first, and during that interval I will cause every inquiry to be made for the lost peasant, whose cunning, I now bethink me, was intended to cause this singular quarrel. But we must be secret, for the King hath strictly charged the crusaders to abstain from duels, and it would ill befit me to set the first public example of disobedience to his royal will. The day after to-morrow I shall be ready to accompany you to the wood beyond the eastern portal of the city.'

Fitzwalter bowed, coldly and haughtily, and D'Artois withdrew.

'Hide thy dead, swift river!' thought the murderer, 'and the honour of Edmund Fitzwalter will be in the keeping of his good right hand.'

The second morning after Artois' visit came, and at daybreak the Count and Edmund, attended by their esquires, met at the gates of the city. They greeted each other courteously, and walked forth together. It was Lammas-day, and—but that the sanctity of the Church feast was more venerated by the pious Louis than it had been by the English Rufus—they could scarcely have hoped to find the forest so free of human guests; for the dun deer bounded fleetly by, and the glorious sun was tinting the east with beams of golden radiance, which, kissing the heavy dewdrops that hung on the aspen boughs, lighted them up with the rays of the many-coloured rainbow. There were a thousand cheerful sounds, too, in the wood: the tapping of the woodpecker on the beech trees, the noise of squirrels,

the hum of a multitude of insects, and, at times, the stroke of the distant woodman's axe.

'T is a fair morning, Sir Edmund,' said the prince, as they passed rapidly onwards, 'and the air is cool enough to let us take some exercise without inconvenience from the heat. I doubt, though, if the fineness of the morning will last.'

His companion assented to the remark, and there was again a silence, which lasted till they approached the thicket in which the unfortunate John o' the Mill had met his death.

'There is a clear spot here, if I rightly remember,' said the Count d'Artois, 'which may well suit our purpose.'

He turned into the thicket, and it required all Fitzwalter's command of mind and countenance to refrain from expressing the emotion he felt when he found that the scene of his crime was fixed on by his antagonist as the place for their encounter. Nor were his unpleasant sensations diminished by a remark of Richard Trafford's to the French esquire, 'that the forest rangers had been busy in the night, and had slain a fat buck there, to judge by the discoloured sod.' The youth addressed glanced carelessly at the spot without answering him, and the Count d'Artois, drawing his sword, inquired 'if his antagonist were ready.'

'One word, Count Robert,' was the reply; and Fitzwalter drew so near the prince, that what he said was audible only to him. 'If you are conqueror in this encounter, I must stipulate that you make no mention of the cause of our quarrel—I mean of the calumny that you so credulously believed. I would not have my gentle cousin grieved by a slander touching the honour of her family, and you wot well that many-tongued rumour will oftentimes from trifles fix a stain on the character, which a knight should preserve as unsullied as the virgin snow.'

‘Be assured that I will comply with your request, Sir Edmund. Your cousin—the Lady Cicely’s peace is as dear to me as it can be to yourself.’

The English knight drew back, and after a courteous salutation with their weapons, the combat began. At first both fought with equal skill and success, but the coolness of the Englishman as the strife became more lengthened gave him an advantage over his hot and impetuous foe. The Count Robert had commenced with no angry feelings towards Fitzwalter, but as his blood warmed his temper rose, the love of battle in every form, which was his passion, prevailed, and he struck at his opponent with a fury equally rash and unguarded. Not so Edmund: his acquired and natural self-command, and, perhaps, greater muscular endurance of fatigue and power of hand as well as skill, were all in his favour, and he contented himself with acting only on the defensive, till the blind fury of Artois enabled him, after slightly wounding him in the side, to disarm him. Panting with rage and exertion, the Count stood for an instant as if in expectation that his death would crown Edmund’s victory; but the English knight, taking up the sword, presented it to him, and, at the same time, extended his hand.

‘Count Robert,’ he said, ‘my honour called for this satisfaction, but I do not desire your life. Take your sword, and I pray you draw it not again in every villain’s quarrel.’

‘By St. Denis! you are a right courteous foe,’ replied Artois, warmly returning the pressure of his hand, though a shade of mortification rested on his handsome features. ‘I am sorry I gave credence to the rogue, who has gained his object of setting us at variance, though he failed of his main purpose, I believe—your defeat and death, Sir Edmund.’

‘T was an artfully devised scheme, my good lord; but let it

be forgotten. I have your promise now—as in case of my own defeat—that the matter shall be secret?’

‘I am bound to you for your late chivalrous gift of my life, Sir Edmund. You have my honour, that I will never in any way, by word or look, hint at the foul slander.’

Sir Edmund Fitzwalter bowed his acknowledgments, turned, and, with an exulting smile, bent his steps towards Lyons, accompanied by Trafford. The excited and a little mortified prince prepared more slowly to follow him. As he retraced the way to the town, Robert reflected with some perplexity on the past scene.

‘I like him not,’ he thought—‘wherefore I know not; for he hath been courteous and generous in his dealing with me to-day; yet I like him not. There was more truth in the poor knave’s bluff countenance—artful rogue though he be—than in all the smooth words and calm cold smiles of this same Englishman. I would that he were not the Lady Cicely’s kinsman.’

As days rolled on, and the peasant did not return to lay his threatened accusation before Louis, the Count d’Artois began to repent of his credulity, and no longer doubted that the impostor’s tale had been artfully framed to create a quarrel between himself and the Englishman—perhaps between the two nations. He endeavoured to overcome his dislike for the knight, and carefully avoided any allusion to the subject of their meeting; and Fitzwalter again flattered himself that his crime was for ever hidden from the cognizance of man.



## CHAPTER XX.

## BOUND FOR PALESTINE.

Upon that scrip, upon that glove,  
 Her tears have left their stain,  
 But they will wear a deeper dye  
 Ere brought to her again.

MISS LANDON.

IT was not until some weeks after the body of the unfortunate miller of Leighton had been committed by his murderer to the keeping of the Rhône, that his absence from his village homestead was made known to his lord by the idiot Perrot, but, as we have said, without any trace being discovered of whither he was gone, or against whom his threatened vengeance had been directed.

The circumstance was gradually forgotten by the knight, who had many affairs of importance to settle prior to his departure, which was delayed from month to month by the rumours then rife, that the King intended to head an army to the East himself the ensuing midsummer. Henry had yielded, in appearance, to the Papal remonstrances and the ardour of his nobles and people, and, shortly after the departure of William Longespée, had extorted a large sum from his subjects, with the professed purpose of employing it in the Holy War; but his zeal went no further. Delays constantly intervened, and at length the sincere in the intended enterprise departed singly, or in small bands, to the general rendezvous at Cyprus. Sir Walter de Lucy and several knights of inferior rank and note were of the latter number, and to them Pauncefort finally resolved to unite himself.

The beginning of November was the time fixed for their em-

barkation, and as he had received the cross from the Bishop of Salisbury, at the same time that William Longsword and the Baron Fitzwalter were 'crossed,' it was now only necessary for him to take the palmer's staff and scrip at the village church of Leighton (with the retainers who followed his pennon), and the eve of Allhallows, which, from its sanctity, was deemed a propitious time, was named for the purpose.

All was bustle and busy preparation in the lordly Hall and its humble dependencies. There is a merciful relief from the agonizing feeling of parting in the many offices of love required for the departing traveller. It is after the beloved are gone, when there remains nothing to be done or thought of for them, that the trial is felt in all its bitterness. Constance de Lingard was fully occupied in embroidering the scrip or purse of her betrothed with the armorial bearings of his house; and many a prayer for the safety and honour of its future wearer was breathed over each golden or silken thread with which it was wrought. Gerald had been all kindness and tenderness towards her since her voluntary acceptance of his troth-pledge, but his manner was marked rather by the character of a brother's feelings for a favourite sister, than by the lover-like ardour of his buried brother. Constance strove to believe that she was unreasonable in her doubts of his attachment; but she had the guidance of her own past experience to render the expression of his countenance—his frequent absence of mind—his pale looks—and the deep sighs he sometimes tried vainly to suppress, intelligible to her, and she resolved to seek an interview alone with him, before his departure, and free him from all ties to herself. If he should still persist in urging her to fulfil the engagement so solemnly contracted beside his father's death-bed, she would chide her heart for its jealous fears, and never

doubt him more. With the hope of meeting him alone—a hope which his careful avoidance of a private conversation had hitherto rendered vain—Constance threw on her coverchief, on the morning destined for the final ceremony of receiving the palmer's staff and scrip, and walked forth in the pleasaunce or garden of the Manor. It was a bright clear morning, October-like, not cold, but fresh and bracing. There was little to please the eye in the despoiled and desolate-looking garden, but the very air of bereavement about the leafless shrubs and dead flower-stalks harmonized well with the lady's feelings at the moment. Constance was about to leave it for the park, when a rustling amongst the dead leaves attracted her attention to Perrot, who had seated himself, unseen by her, beneath a holly, and was tying branches of rosemary and rue together.

'What are you doing, Giles?' she asked.

'I am tying posies to deck the church, lady,' he replied. 'The Abbot of Westburn and his friars will be here at noon, and we must make the old church look gay for them.'

'Your posies are of the saddest, Giles,' said the maiden.

'Truly, lady, I could find none other now; and you wot well, rosemary is for remembrance! We shall always remember them in church, when they are all gone, you know. It is *there* I ever think of mother and our pretty Nelly.'

He sighed, and looked sorrowfully up in Constance's face for a moment; but the shadow passed rapidly from his brow, and he continued—

'I shall get some of the bright red berries yonder, that the robins love, and mingle them with the dark yew boughs. They will look gay enough.'

'Have you seen your lord this morning, boy?' asked Constance, with a slight blush.

‘Ay, lady,—he is in the church, praying. I heard Father Dennis tell him that it befitted a Christian knight to pray and meditate after confession, on such a solemn day. When he hath finished, we are going to deck the chapel.’

He bent again over his task, as if the recollection that his herbs and berries might be soon wanted hurried his labours.

Constance turned from him, and directed her somewhat agitated steps to the church. It was at the distance of about a quarter of a mile from the Hall, and as the lady walked slowly towards it, she endeavoured to collect her thoughts, and nerve herself for the task before her. Leighton Church was a beautiful specimen of the exquisite style of architecture which prevailed in the reign of Henry the Third; but it was not in admiration of its rich gothic arches or light pillars that Constance paused in the noble doorway. Before the altar knelt him she sought, in deep and devout abstraction; and fearful of disturbing his devotions, and trembling at her own boldness in intruding on his privacy, unasked, she stood blushing and scarcely daring to breathe in the centre aisle. The sun’s rays, piercing the windows above the altar, fell on the knight’s rich curls, tinging them with a hue of gold, rested upon the stately monument erected to the memory of the late Lord of Leighton Manor, and fell in chequered light on the stone pavement of the aisle, round the lady’s feet. There was a profound stillness in and round the church; the silence was broken only by the occasional flitting of a dead leaf against the side windows, or the chirp of the churchyard bird—the robin.

The quiet and sanctity of the spot restored the maiden’s self-possession, and when Gerald rose from his knees, and with a slight exclamation of surprise advanced to greet her, she answered his salutation with calm and frank gracefulness.



'You are surprised to see me here,' she said, 'but to-day is the last we may spend together for many a long year, Gerald, and I would fain speak with you alone, before the many who love you, and have claims on your time, gather round you. Forgive my intrusion, and hear me for a few minutes!'

'Forgive you, fair Constance!' said the knight, as he led her into the church porch; 'rather let me thank you for the favour and grace you do me. I thought when first I rose and beheld you—robed, as it were, in the bright sunlight—that Heaven had vouchsafed to send an angel messenger to bless my enterprise. No fairer omen could be given to knight or pilgrim than his lady's presence, thus graciously bestowed on him.'

'Alas!' said the maiden, mournfully, 'you address me ever in the courteous terms of chivalry, Gerald, and such is not the language of the heart! But let us sit down here, mine early friend, for I have much to say to you, and no spot is more fitting for our converse than the very threshold of God's holy temple.'

The knight seated himself beside her, on the stone bench within the porch, and she continued: 'Do not interrupt me, Gerald, for I must speak frankly, or we may both be wretched. You would wed me, because it was the dying wish of your noble sire—and you would also keep the troth-pledge pledged at his death-bed, because you are of a generous spirit, and know that Constance de Lingard is a helpless orphan—nay, you promised not to interrupt me, Gerald! But I fear me I shall not make you happy. You love me as a brother would his sister, but that will not suffice for your future happiness, albeit it might for mine. I have sometimes deemed you loved another, for you have looked and sighed as *they* do who are struggling to make their affection subservient to their duty. If such be, in-

deed, the case, my poor Gerald, how unutterably miserable must you be !'

'Constance,' interrupted the knight, much agitated, 'you could not speak in that tone had you not known the trial you describe. I charge you, as you value your promise of speaking now *all* the truth, tell me, have you not thus suffered ?'

'I have,' she replied, after a moment's pause.

'And is it your betrothal to me that has thus grieved you ?' he asked, as the remembrance of her former engagement to his brother recurred to him.

'No,' said the maiden, with a crimson blush ; and she continued hurriedly, as if to banish the remembrance of what she had said from the mind of her companion ; 'I loved Edward, as I believe you do me, Gerald, with a true and fraternal love, and I doubt not, that with the aid of our blessed Lady, I should have overcome every other feeling, and in time given him my whole heart ; but I know how bitter was the struggle, and I would spare you it ; for man's nature is not so enduring, and—forgive me—self-denying as woman's ; therefore I free you from your troth-pledge, and whether you already love another maiden, or have yet to bestow your affections, you are free ! Nay, be silent ! you *must* hear me to the end. Do not think I should be happy in our union, if you were not. Far rather would I forsake this sad world, and find my happiness in the peaceful duties of the cloister. Methinks I am well fitted for a nun ! But never could I know peace if you were wretched, or whilst I dreamed that I had cast a shadow on your life. Gerald, you are free.'

She rose and would have left him, but he gently detained her.

'Constance,' he said, 'I have heard you with more of admiration than I ever felt before for woman. And now I will be

frank with you, as you have been with me. You were right, my betrothed. I have—ay, to this very hour—loved another maiden; but, Constance, one immeasurably inferior to you in all save beauty. I have seen her defects from the first, but there was a witching grace about her that threw a charm over her very faults. I thank the saints that I have fully read thy gentle and generous spirit, dearest, for it has broken the spell that bound me, and made me wholly thine own. Never will I renounce thee, Constance. What! dost think that I could not imitate thine own noble example if need were? But at this moment might I in honour choose from all the world, thou, and thou only, shouldst be my wedded lady and my love. Dost thou heed me?’

A smile was the only reply he received from his now weeping betrothed. ‘You mean all you say, Gerald, at this moment, I fully believe,’ she said; ‘but if hereafter you meet this lady—I would she were more worthy of you!—and your former affection should revive——’

‘Nay, Constance, hear me then swear——’

She laid her hand on his lips.

‘Swear not at all,’ she said, gently and solemnly; ‘I ask no promise and no pledge from you. If, when you return to England, you should still wish to claim the poor Constance, you will not find she loves you less. But should you again meet the lady of whom you spoke but now, and wish but for a moment (for her sake) that you were free,—believe you are so, and for *my* sake woo and wed her.’

‘I will not swear, my betrothed,’ said Gerald, kissing her hand ere he resigned it, ‘for no oaths could bind me more firmly than your own generous conduct. And, Constance, I am truly a willing captive,’ he continued, smiling.

Probably Constance de Lingard believed his further protestations, for when they joined the Dame Edith an hour afterwards there was a happy glow on her cheek and a smile on her lip, which they had not worn for weeks ; and her happiness was reflected in the countenance of Pauncefort.

At noon the ringing of the church bells announced the approaching procession of the pilgrims, and, clad in complete armour, the Knight of Leighton issued from his fathers' hall, leading his betrothed by the hand ; a Knight Hospitaller, who was to accompany him to Palestine, followed, escorting the Lady Pauncefort ; the esquires came next, and then the waiting damsels, trying to look solemn and demure as befitted the occasion—in which attempt they were somewhat hindered by the roguish tricks and arch jests of two young pages, who sometimes preceded and sometimes mingled with them, and who, feeling nothing of the sadness of the scene, eagerly anticipated a spectacle which as yet was new to them.

The party from the hall paused without the church door to allow the village procession to enter its hallowed precincts first, and at the same time to gratify the natural pride of the knight, by presenting to his fellow-soldier's view the gallant body of men who aspired to fight the battles of Christendom beneath his pennon. Well might Sir Gerald Pauncefort exult, both as a leader and an Englishman, as he gazed upon the matchless peasantry of his country ; for amongst the knights who had been born and bred in England, and had dwelt generally on the estates their forefathers had won nearly two hundred years before, the old contempt for their Saxon vassals was gradually passing away, and in such a mind as Pauncefort's could never have had an existence, even if he had not had Saxon blood in his veins ; but it was by marriage with an heiress of that nation

that the first Paunceforts had, as we have before said, obtained their fair Manor.

The yeomen and freemen who had assumed the Cross came first, bearing their stalwart figures proudly, for their character of crusaders had invested them with a new dignity in the eyes of the rustics who followed them, and they were by no means unwilling to receive the homage paid them by the less warlike and devout of their neighbours. They were all 'tall men of their hands and true,' and each frank sunburnt face was lighted up by religious enthusiasm and martial ardour. Then followed the regular men-at-arms, a fine body of spearmen, and then the serfs, who willingly forgot their feudal slavery to mingle with their free brethren in the wars of Palestine. So eager, indeed, had the inferior tenants of the soil been to assume the Cross, that their young lord had difficulty in restraining their zeal and preventing his lands from being utterly deserted save by old men and boys. A more interesting band, in some respects, followed the pilgrims—the aged men, who could never hope to witness the return of sons and grandsons who were to depart on the morrow; women, who would become, perhaps, childless widows by the consequences of the approaching ceremony; and sisters and betrothed maidens, who sought vainly to repress their tears, and yet whose pride in the valour and bold bearing of those whose departure they mourned, checked the wish that they should tarry in their own land. The abbot of a neighbouring monastery had proffered his assistance and that of his brethren on the occasion, but they had not yet arrived, and the Leighton peasantry had all entered the chapel and taken their places in reverent silence ere the monks' well-fed mules were descried in the distance. Pauncefort received them bare-headed, and with much humility bent for the abbot's benediction.

'We feared, holy father,' he said, as he conducted them towards the chapel, 'that we were not to be honoured by your presence, since you came not at the hour of dinner according to your promise.'

'We will sup with you, my son, instead thereof,' replied the priest; 'doubtless we shall need some refreshment after the ceremony. But I pray you keep not our fair daughters yonder in the cold air; we will greet them anon, for there is a smack of winter in the breeze to-day. Our sacristan has brought garments, for which we would fain lay aside our riding gear, that we may honour this holy and joyful ceremony with all befitting solemnity.'

The knight obeyed, and, leaving the priests to the care of Father Dennis, conducted his fair betrothed into the church, followed by the other members of his family. Constance, as she took her seat on the carved chair beside the Dame Edith, gazed around her with a feeling of reverential awe. There was even at noonday a gloom in Leighton Chapel, peculiarly conducive to devotional feeling, for in the management of light, as well as in the varied beauties of their architecture, our forefathers' places of worship greatly excelled our own. Who ever feels of so prayerful and subdued a frame of mind in a light, airy, modern church, every corner of which is illuminated by the flaunting sunbeams, as in the 'dim religious light' of an old abbey, or even of an ancient country church? Few can, with truth, refuse to acknowledge its influence on the spirit, or deny that in the solemn temples on which our ancestors employed the taste and imagination God bestowed to His glory, they have felt more peculiarly that they were in a spot set apart from the vain, and sinful, and restless world without, in which they may lay aside the burden of the flesh, and commune with the

Eternal One. Tall wax tapers burned upon the altar, and the pillars were wreathed with bows of dark evergreens mingled with the scarlet berries of the mountain ash. At length the doors were thrown open, and the abbot in his robes, followed by a train of stoled priests, slowly advanced up the middle aisle, their deep melodious voices swelling through the church as they chanted the 'Gloria in Excelsis.'

And the service of the Mass began. Who now can fully comprehend the mingled feelings of those kneeling worshippers?—the enthusiasm, the hope, the self-sacrifice, the pride, and the despair, mingling with the cold indifference of those who (veiling their hopes of plunder, or escape from offended law, beneath the mask of religion) listened to the chanted invocations? The abbot, a Dominican (and consequently, by Papal command, as well as by inclination, a preacher of the crusade), at the close of the Mass ascended the richly-carved pulpit of wood, and taking for his text the words of our Lord, 'Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life,' addressed his hearers with much fervour, congratulating them on being the very persons to whom those consoling words were applicable—whose reward would be great, both in this world and in the next. 'The star that guided the kings of the far East to Bethlehem had again risen on the earth, and invited all, even the most flagrant sinners, to follow its rays, which led to imperishable glory in this world, and sure salvation in that which was to come.' He warned them against suffering any earthly affections or covetous thoughts to render them lukewarm in the great cause, 'since he who, having "put his hand to the plough, looketh back, is not fit for the kingdom of God." To

die for the holy sepulchre was to triumph over death itself, and to find the guerdon of eternal felicity. Wherefore, then, grieve, even if certain that such would be their fate? But he trusted that the crusaders would return crowned with victory, to lay their palm-branches before the altar of that very church; and here he drew an animated picture of the joy and the triumph of their return. For the present he urged them to think only of their high calling—the freedom of Jerusalem. It was their duty to forget all, save the vows they had taken; the mother who had nursed and cherished them, the home of their childhood, the country of their fathers, the wife of their bosom—all were to be forgotten—the holy sepulchre alone remembered. ‘March on,’ he continued, ‘and cleanse it from the pollution of infidels who defile it. Win for yourselves a name in the deathless records of eternity by freeing Christ’s heritage, and then in life or death may you claim the promise of my text, “to receive an hundredfold, and inherit everlasting life.”’

The abbot then proceeded to the altar, and, beginning with the knights and esquires, presented each *croisé* with the pilgrim’s staff and scrip. The benediction was bestowed, and the congregation then dispersed—part of them to the village ale-house, where a plentiful repast had been ordered for them by their munificent leader, and the others to the Hall, where a supper had been prepared for them as well as for the reverend abbot and his brethren.

It was a melancholy evening, nevertheless, and a still more melancholy morrow. The morning was damp and foggy, and the sun shone at intervals with a sickly light. At first there was much noise and bustle, clattering of horses’ feet, and clashing of arms; but when all was ready, and the mounted men-at-arms stood without the Hall waiting the coming forth of



their leader, it was succeeded by an oppressive silence. The very horses seemed to sympathize with their riders' dejection, and drooped their heads listlessly—perhaps the weather affected them; and the dogs howled mournfully, as if they also were cognizant of the matter. The bower-maidens clustered together and spoke in low tones, and even the giddy pages looked grave and thoughtful. Then the tread of the armed knight was heard as he descended to the hall, accompanied by his friend, his noble mother, and the Lady Constance. Sir Almeric's adieux were grave and courteous; and Sir Gerald, bending his knee, implored his parent's blessing.

'Be thou blessed, Gerald,' she said, 'and succeed to thy father's name in arms in Palestine. Be sure, my son, that if prayers offered early and late before the throne of Heaven may assure thy safe and glorious return, they shall not be wanting. Fare thee well, my last left and youngest-born, all good angels be with thee and defend thee!'

She pressed her lips upon his brow, and a tear fell on it, but when he rose, he saw that she had dashed it away, and smiled. He turned to Constance, and the words in which he addressed her were uttered in a voice too low for any other ear, and were, even to her, indistinct and unconnected. He bent to kiss, for the last time, her cheek; it was deathly cold, and the adieux she murmured faint and sad. Then turning away, he stood for one brief moment on the threshold of his home, gazing across the drawbridge (perchance for the last time) on the old trees, beneath which he had played in boyhood; the next he was in the saddle, and his voice rang cheerily out as he shouted the war-cry of the Crusaders, 'Remember the Holy Sepulchre!' He was answered by a hearty English cheer, and then the little band galloped off, and were soon hidden by overshadowing







*Departure from Leighton.*



boughs of the huge beeches from the eyes of the weeping women who watched them from the hall door of Leighton. Their road led through the village. At every cottage door they passed stood the weeping wives and mothers, whose dwellings were left to them desolate ; whilst the aged men and boys, and the few serfs and rustics who unwillingly remained at home, followed them on their way with prayers and good wishes. At last they reached the open country, and their young leader, whose generous spirit sympathized in their natural regrets, to rouse the flagging courage and enthusiasm of his soldiers, again shouted in a loud clear tone, animating as a clarion call, the oft-repeated cry of the crusaders' camp, ' Remember the Holy Sepulchre ! ' The men-at-arms responded in the same words, and so long and cheerily did their voices ring in the morning air, that the timid fawn, crouching in the wood that skirted the road, started, and fled farther into its recesses, and the labourer paused in his task to listen to the significant sound.

Thus departed the English crusaders.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### EUDOCIA.

It is a pretty youth—not very pretty ;  
 But sure he's proud ; and yet his pride becomes him :  
 He'll make a proper man.

*As You Like It.*

**O**UR tale must now retrograde for two or three months, that we may join the other followers of the Cross at

Marseilles, about the end of the preceding August. The Lady Cicely Fitzwalter sailed for Cyprus with her royal mistress the Queen of France, and Edmund was invited to accompany the worthy Seneschal of Champagne, who, with about twenty knights, embarked from the above-mentioned port a few days afterwards. The embarkation of the French *croisés* was an imposing spectacle. The southern sun gave a gorgeous splendour to the beautiful and tranquil sea, and to the lofty spires and antique buildings of the ancient city of Marseilles, making the armour of the men-at-arms and the knights' helmets shine like burnished gold. The quay was thronged with spectators, and a procession of priests from the town preceded the military array, chanting, as they walked, a solemn litany.

And then, when all had embarked, the clerks and friars who accompanied them answered their brethren's sacred chorus by a hymn to the Virgin; the mariners set their sails in the name of God; and as the vessels yielded slowly to the power of the rising breeze, their sides were crowded by those who gazed, perhaps for the last time, on their fair France, the land of chivalry and song. The wind favoured them till they beheld the romantic shores of Barbary, but towards sunset of the same day gradually lessened. Edmund Fitzwalter was standing gazing thoughtfully on a high mountain that cast its huge shadow on the unruffled sea, when the Seneschal approached him. De Joinville's countenance lacked its usual hilarious expression, and Edmund remarked that he gazed with a kind of superstitious awe on the gigantic promontory before them.

'I have been thinking, Sir Edmund,' he said, 'that he must be a fool who should put himself into maritime dangers, having wronged any one, or having a mortal sin on his conscience; for when we go to sleep at night, we know not if in the morning

we may not find ourselves beneath yon deep and treacherous ocean.'

The English knight bowed assent, and a shadow stole over his brow.

'Mariners tell strange tales of the sea,' continued De Joinville. 'I once chanced to meet a noble Venetian, at the Court of Count Henri of Champagne, who related a marvellous legend of the discovery of a murder committed on it.'

'Indeed?' replied his companion, abstractedly.

'Ay, 't was a wild tale. A vessel bearing pilgrims and merchandise to Acre, could not pass a certain spot in the sea, though wind and tide were favourable, and her mariners skilful and vigorous; till one on board, a grave and melancholy man, who bore the mark of Cain upon his dark brow, acknowledged that he had, in former years, secretly slain his foe, and cast him into the sea on that very spot. They bound the murderer till they could bring him to justice, and then the good ship bounded over the waves like a hound loosed from the leash.'

'A marvellous legend, indeed, my good lord,' said the Englishman, with an ironical smile. 'I confess it passeth my power of belief. I trust no such mischance may befall us, for a calm is a severe trial to one's patience.'

'I do not fear it, because I trust that there is no hidden crime to be discovered,' said De Joinville; 'though the saints forbid that I should doubt the power of Heaven to reveal it, if there were. The elements, I well believe, may be made the instruments of God's vengeance, and witnesses against the murderer.'

The conversation had taken a turn peculiarly unpleasant to Fitzwalter; and inwardly condemning, in no measured terms, the simplicity and credulity of his companion, he asked some



questions relative to the Court of Count Henri of Champagne, which turned the thoughts of the Seneschal from their gloomy and superstitious current, and transported him in imagination to the sunny plains of his beloved land, and the chivalrous circle that surrounded his liege lord, to whom he was attached with all the warmth and sincerity of his character.

But the morrow came, and its sun rose and set on the same evil-omened mountain: still its huge shadow lay on the waters in sullen gloom, like the offended genius of the land, foreshadowing the dark fate which awaited the crusaders. Another day-break, and still the calm bound them beneath it; and then the superstitious fears of many were roused, and the murderer was again tortured by hearing legends of strangely-discovered crimes, and horrible judgments falling on the unabsolved. It was a relief, like lifting a weight of iron from his heart, when a discreet churchman relieved their distress by the assurance that, in case of any unpleasant occurrence in his parish, all was set to rights by making a procession three times of a Saturday. It was, fortunately, Saturday morning, and Edmund Fitzwalter's voice was eagerly raised to implore the Seneschal to order the ceremony forthwith; not that he believed in its efficacy, but that it would occupy and remove his unconscious tormentors. The procession was made three times round the masts of the ship, even those who suffered under the horrible infliction of sea-sickness being supported by their companions in the circle. The act of faith was as successful as 'whistling for a wind' in modern times occasionally is: the breeze freshened, and bore them cheerily on their destined course. It was an incident that made an impression on the minds of all, for the Seneschal himself has recorded it, and how could it fail of affecting the remorseful spirit of the knight, who vainly struggled to believe that there

was no avenging Providence, and that man was merely the slave and puppet of a blind chance?

They landed at Limisso, where Henry de Lusignan, the King of Cyprus, had already received his royal guest, King Louis, and resigned his own palace to his use. Every day saw the arrival of some fresh galley or English ship, and Fitzwalter recognized, by its banner, the vessel of the Earl of Salisbury, amongst those which lay at anchor near the entrance of the harbour. The streets were thronged by crusaders from almost every country of Christendom—the white-robed Templars (scowling defiance upon the rival Order of St. John whenever they chanced to encounter each other), Burgundians, Bretons, and Free Companions. Fitzwalter passed through their busy groups on his passage to the place where his men were to be billeted, occasionally pausing to exchange a hurried salutation with a fellow-countryman or French acquaintance. Separate quarters had been assigned to each nation, by the judicious policy of Henry de Lusignan, who feared the quarrels that national jealousy might produce in too close an intercourse; the leaders, however, dwelling together, in the best mansions of the city, in all harmony.

The Baron Fitzwalter had arrived, and (after bestowing the men-at-arms who had formed the escort of Cicely through France with their fellow-retainers) Edmund hastened to greet his uncle. The English noble welcomed his young kinsman gladly, telling him he was well satisfied with the manner in which he had done his devoir in escorting his daughter.

‘It was an ill chance, not finding the Queen in Paris,’ he observed; ‘but perhaps it was as well, since Cicely hath won a devoted servant in the brother of Louis. Nay, if the peevish girl mar not her own fortune by some feminine caprices, I hope

yet to see her the sister-in-law of her royal mistress.' Edmund listened to this communication in silence, and entreating his kinsman's permission to greet his fair cousin, learned that she dwelt with the Queen and her ladies at the palace, which was in the city, but surrounded by groves that separated it from the other buildings and public streets. The Baron told him that a page should guide him thither, but bade him return before the night closed in, as robberies and violence were to be dreaded in so densely and variously peopled a town, and he was anxious to avoid collision with the French.

'King Louis treats us with all courtesy,' he said, 'but there be those of his vassals and followers who love not the English name better than they did when Richard of the Lion Heart was among them. But for the forbearance of William Longespée, the Count d'Artois had, ere this, fastened a quarrel upon him.'

'T is strange,' said Edmund, 'that he should show so marked an aversion to our nation, since he loves an English maiden.'

'Nay, it is only to Salisbury he shows aversion; and methinks his dislike (which is very evident) savours of jealousy of the Earl's renown, for Robert of Artois is greedy of chivalrous fame, and too proud and rash to mask either his hatred or his love.'

The Baron Fitzwalter was partly right, though it was not jealousy of the Earl's name in arms that caused the Count's show of animosity, for the confident and vain as well as gallant spirit of the French prince, assured him of future renown, equal, if not superior, to that of any living warrior. But Cicely had praised the English hero; Cicely ever looked gratified by the Earl's attentions, and pleased when his skill in the warlike pastimes, which were often held, gave him the advantage over his companions; and so wildly did the young man love her, that he would have felt jealous even of a pet falcon or dog. The

coquettish favour which, at her cousin's request, she had shown him whilst in France, and on her first arrival in Cyprus, had been gradually withdrawn ; for she was not desirous that her noble-minded Pauncefort, when he reached the army, should witness conduct she felt he would reprobate, or that he should doubt the truth and sincerity of her affection. This difference Artois ascribed to the presence of the Earl of Salisbury, and so bitterly did he, in consequence, hate his supposed rival, that nothing but the wise forbearance of Longsword had hitherto repressed the explosion of that fierce jealousy, which was afterwards so fatal to the army of the Cross on the plains of Massoura. The retainers, of course, took up their masters' known sentiments and supposed causes of affront, and one rash young squire, who, from personal favours he had received, was deeply devoted to the English leader, was gravely rebuked by his lord for the warmth with which he had replied to some injurious speeches from Artois' followers. The circumstance reached the ear of Louis, who, already busy in accommodating the quarrels of the Templars and Hospitallers, now found himself menaced with contentions among his own especial followers. With the frankness of his generous nature, the King thanked the Earl for his magnanimous self-command, beseeching him 'for the sake of the holy enterprise they had undertaken, to pay no heed to the untamed impetuosity of his hot-headed brother, but to assist in preserving strict discipline in the camp.'

Salisbury pledged his word to obey the royal behest, and a proclamation was made the evening of the same day, through Limisso, in the names of all the chiefs of the army, as well as in the King's, strictly forbidding private quarrels, and calling on all who had taken the Cross to remember the vows that bound them, and to love as true brethren and Christians.

Amongst those who paused in their progress through the city to listen to this declaration of their leaders' will, was a youth of between nineteen and twenty years of age. He wore the garb of an esquire, and was mounted on a strong *palefroi*, or horse generally used for travelling. He checked its rapid career at the first sound of the '*Oyes*' of the herald, and slowly walked it down the street, leaning a little forward, and resting his hand on the noble animal's mane, while he listened to the proclamation, with a slight smile on his handsome lip. When it reached its close he drew a deep breath, almost amounting to a groan, and again urging his horse to the greatest speed which the crowded street would allow, directed his course towards the city gates. As soon as he had passed them he broke into a gallop, and never slackened his pace till he had left Limisso some miles behind him, and entered a wood, or rather cluster of groves, which might, in early ages, have been a spot sacred to the worship of the Greek incarnation of Beauty, to whom the isle was dedicated, for upon a fairer scene even the southern sun seldom looked. As the way grew entangled by the clustering thickets, the young Englishman alighted, and led his horse through the narrow pathway, putting back with his left hand the branches of flowering myrtle or boughs of orange trees that occasionally crossed his road.

At length he stood in an amphitheatre of orange trees, whose odours loaded the soft breeze till it became almost heavy with sweetness. In the centre of the spot stood a broken marble fountain, which no longer played, the stream which had supplied it flowing now tranquilly at its foot, only busied in nursing on its limpid bosom the large pure water-lilies, which took a blushing hue in the crimson sunset. A fallen shaft and some ruined pedestals of Ionic pillars lay near the rivulet—perhaps

part of a temple of Venus in some far-off age. In spite of the beauty of the spot, the perfumed air, and the song which the nightingale was already beginning, the youth's brow was darkened by a frown, and he looked anything but in harmony with the tranquil hour, as he observed that the solitude was all his own—that no one was near to share its beauty with him. And, in truth, Wilfred de Lucy, for so the young stranger was named, had not, perhaps, much sympathy with the charms of the southern isle. He would have preferred the cold, bracing, and invigorating breezes of his native Northumberland, to the soft-scented air that pressed on his brow, and the view of the stern coast and bounding waves of the Northern Ocean, familiar to his childhood, to bowers of myrtle and orange groves.

He tied his horse to a tree, and commenced walking impatiently up and down by the stream, occasionally pausing and gazing into the clear water, but with no Narcissus-like feelings, although he was handsome enough to have been excused some small share of vanity. The sun set, and the brief rosy twilight of the country began. Wilfred had mentally resolved to wait only till the bright September moon should rise, and then, availing himself of her light, to retrace his steps through the dark wood of cypress and myrtle, to a lodging without the city where he intended to pass the night, when a rustling of the boughs met his ear, and the next moment a girl, in the dress of a Cypriot peasant, slowly advanced towards him. She was very young, but her form had all the grace and symmetry of a Grecian statue, and her luxuriant auburn hair, and perfect features, at once established her claim to a descent from the ancient colonists of a province of the Eastern empire.

'Eudocia!' exclaimed the esquire, with a mixture of impatience, reproach, and tenderness in his manner; 'are you come

at last? I have tarried long for you! Wherefore are you so late?’

‘I scarcely hoped to come at all,’ said the maiden, giving her hand to Wilfred, and suffering him to seat her by his side on the fallen pillar; ‘and this must be our last interview, Wilfred. My father hates your nation more than ever: he cannot forget the injuries his family received from your King of the Lion’s Heart; and although poor, and dwelling in a ruin, he still cherishes with pride the remembrance that he is a descendant of the race of Comnenus. He will never give his daughter to an Englishman, Wilfred, even if you return (as I doubt not you will) with renown, and with the gilt spurs of knighthood. He will never sanction our union.’

The young girl spoke in Norman French, with a slightly foreign accent, but still intelligibly and sweetly to the ear of her young lover, though the purport of her speech greatly disturbed him.

‘By St. George! it almost passes belief, that a man should be proud of descending from such a tyrant and false knight as was Isaac Comnenus! I had doubted it, Eudocia, if I had not heard it from *your* lips, and known certain troublesome neighbours of our own in Northumberland who pride themselves on being the descendants of as arrant a race of thieves as may well be found. But you will not give me up, Eudocia, for so wild a fancy? I am of good blood, a gentleman by descent and spirit. I shall return from this war a knight, laden with infidel wealth; then your stern sire will perchance relent, and suffer me to lay it at your feet.’

The girl smiled sadly.

‘I do not hope it, Wilfred,’ she said: ‘he would refuse the heir of England, did *he* even ask me for his bride. But I do

promise you I will wed with no one but yourself. If, when you return, nothing can soften his implacable hatred to your countrymen, I will take the veil in a convent of Limisso, and give you all I can—my prayers.'

The esquire kissed the hand he held: he hoped, with the sanguine spirit of youth, that she prophesied falsely; perhaps the thought suggested itself, that her father might no longer live, an obstacle to the fulfilment of his wishes, when next he trod the shores of Cyprus.

'Wherefore came you not yester-eve?' asked Eudocia; 'I thought I should have seen you every day during my father's absence.'

'My excellent lord, the brave Earl of Salisbury, detained me on matter of some moment, and I did not dare ask him to allow one of my comrades to execute my duties for me, because he was somewhat wroth with me.'

'Wroth with you!' said the maiden, gazing for a moment in his frank and handsome face, as if she marvelled how that were possible; 'how did you displease him, Wilfred?'

'I'faith, in rather a singular manner—by chastising the insolence of a puppy who was maligning him.'

Eudocia opened her large dark eyes with an expression of wonder.

'You jest, Wilfred?' she said.

'There is no jest in the matter, fair lady. The King of France is a right noble gentleman, and I like him well enough; though of course we English would far rather have been led by a Plantagenet; but his brother, the Count d'Artois, is the most self-sufficient, impertinent puppy that ever drew breath. He hates my noble leader through envy and jealousy—perhaps, too, because he has the blood of Plantagenet in his veins—and



would fain fasten a quarrel on him ; but William of Salisbury is as wise as he is brave and courteous, and he puts aside the boy's insolence with a calm and dignified indifference that savoureth somewhat of contempt.'

'And you quarrelled with a French prince, Wilfred?'

'Prince or King were the same to me, if he dared slander my friend,' said young De Lucy, bluntly ; 'but I did not so far disturb the peace of the camp. It was only a knave serving-man that I hit on his crown with the hilt of my dagger ; but my lord earl was, nevertheless, displeased by my championship, and charged me to resent nothing that I might hear said by the French against him, as I valued his favour.'

'Then, if you wish to obey him,' said Eudocia, laughing, 'you had better avoid the company of those who love him not, my hot-headed friend.'

Wilfred would have punished her taunt of his discretion by a kiss, but she repulsed him with a dignity that well became her noble though youthful countenance, and rising from her seat, told him she must return home.

'Not yet, Eudocia,' he said ; 'the moon is very bright, and I will walk to your dwelling with you: your old nurse is sleeping, be sure, and will not chide your long tarrying. And you have not seen Constantine—I called him Constantine, to please *you*. Come and look at him, poor fellow ! I am sure he knows you, and is delighted to hear your soft voice, and feel your gentle hand caress him.'

He drew her gently towards his favourite horse, and enjoyed her admiration of him with boyish pleasure ; then loosening the bridle from the tree and throwing it over one arm, he proffered his other hand to Eudocia, and they walked slowly through the wood towards her home, often pausing to make the way longer,

and chatting of a thousand subjects, with all of which Wilfred de Lucy mingled the story of his love. At length they reached a dwelling, built against, and partly beneath, the ruins of what had once been a Greek temple. It was a poor and lowly abode, sheltered, however, by several beautiful pomegranate and acacia trees. Eudocia opened the door and admitted herself into the rudely furnished dwelling, for its other inmates, the old nurse and an African slave, had retired to rest. It was the first time Wilfred had been beyond the threshold, and he gazed round the apartment with much curiosity. A sword with a splendid hilt, suspended to the wall, caught his eye, a few pieces of rusty armour, and a falcon. These tokens of the gentle descent of the impoverished Greek excited his surprise.

‘I thought you told me, dear Eudocia,’ he said, ‘that your father was a man of peace, devoting himself to study, and never seeking to better his lot by the arts of chivalrous warfare. Why does he preserve these weapons, and whose is yonder bird?’

‘The armour and the sword are family relics,’ said the girl, in a low, sad voice: ‘he loves to look upon them, though his training for the Church unfitted and disinclined him for their use. The falcon is his sole amusement, the only knightly one of which he ever partakes. And now good night, Wilfred. You must return hither no more. My father will be here by to-morrow evening, and it would be dangerous to rouse his anger.’

‘Is he harsh to you, dearest Eudocia?’ asked the youth.

‘Oh, no! very kind and gentle,’ she said, earnestly; ‘he has nothing now to love but me.’

‘I must see you once again before I bid you farewell,’ said Wilfred. ‘I will sleep without the gates, and be here to-morrow morning, before your sire’s return.’

'Come very early then, Wilfred,' replied the young Greek. 'Again, good night; the saints keep and defend you!'

They parted. Whilst threading his way, on foot, through the thickest mazes of the wood, the squire was sad and thoughtful; but when, springing on his steed, he gained space to ride briskly forward, his spirits rose with the rapid motion through the clear night air; and bounding his view of the future only to the morrow, he eagerly and joyously anticipated meeting Eudocia by the bright light of a Cyprus morning.



## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE FALCON.

Of gentle blood was she; but tide of time,  
 Age after age, bore onwards to decay  
 The fortunes of her fathers. . . . .  
 Last of his race—a lowly Forester!

PROFESSOR WILSON.

NEVER had Eudocia Comnena looked more radiantly beautiful than on the morrow morning, when, faithful to his promise, the youth entered her father's home. She said he must not tarry long; but he had walked to her dwelling and feigned fatigue sufficiently well to deceive her, and induce her to consent to his resting for a very unreasonable time, considering his youth and activity. He had much to tell her of the crusaders' army—of his own boyish hopes of distinction and renown, and even of his horse, and hawk, and hound—to

all of which Eudocia listened with equal interest, for she was almost a child herself, and Wilfred was the first young companion she had ever known. Her only associates before she met him had been her old Greek nurse, a kind but aged creature, and her father, a proud, discontented, melancholy man. He was, as his daughter had said, a descendant of Isaac of Cyprus, and on the ruin of his family had been destined for the cloister, but, before he had taken the final vows, saw and loved the daughter of a Cypriot peasant. For her he forgot—for the first and only time—his pride of birth and his sacred vocation. He left the cloister and became a dweller in the forest, living on the scanty property still left him, and a small pension allowed him annually by a rich relative in Constantinople. His wife had died when Eudocia was born, and from that period the Greek lived a solitary and unhappy man, devoting himself to study of the deepest nature, even to that forbidden by the Church—astrology and the occult sciences. He had built his dwelling by the ruin, because, from its still partly perfect roof, he could better contemplate the starry heavens, which were to him the scroll of destiny; and within its walls was a small cell or chamber, which he made his study and laboratory. He had no friends except a noble Venetian who dwelt in Limisso; nor did he wish for any: the light spirit of his country had been extinguished beneath the pressure of adversity, and only its fiercest and darkest passions remained. He loved his daughter, but not as well as he loved himself, nor would he have sacrificed a whim for her happiness. It was, therefore, not surprising that Eudocia should have been won by Wilfred de Lucy as soon as she beheld his bright smile and heard his joyous voice. He was like a sunbeam in a dark dungeon, and, in perfect ignorance of all the forms of society, she gladly talked

with him, and met him in the orange groves, sometimes with her nurse, sometimes alone. From this aged attendant she had learnt that her father would never sanction her union with an Englishman, although so brave and beautiful; and, at her entreaty, she had promised to see him no more.

They had been conversing some time, and had forgotten its lapse and the necessity for the squire's return to Limisso, when their conference was interrupted by the sound of approaching horses' feet, mingled with loud shouts and the baying of a hound. A few notes of a bugle had, at the same time, the effect of making Wilfred de Lucy spring to his feet and exclaim eagerly,

'There are some of the crusaders approaching, Eudocia! I would not be seen here, nor do I wish them to know how fair a face is concealed in the woods. Can we not withdraw to some inner and private apartment till they have passed by?'

'If you wish it, dear Wilfred,' said the maiden, calmly; 'but I do not think they will stop here,—they have never before stopped here. Yet, if you think Earl William (should he be with them) would be displeased to see you, or to know that you were absent from Limisso, we can tarry in my father's study.'

She rose as she spoke, and he followed her into a kind of anteroom, from which a narrow winding passage conducted them to the small and secret chamber in which Paul Comnenus communed with the spirits of the dead in their immortal writings, or pondered on the star-lighted future. With a strange feeling of curiosity and awe, the young and ignorant Anglo-Norman gazed around the solemn and somewhat gloomy apartment—at the ponderous tomes; the unknown instruments of the chemist and the mathematician; the globes, and the metal images of the planets, with which it was furnished.

'Is your father a necromancer—a wizard, Eudocia?' he asked in a low voice and with a slight shudder; 'I have heard they use such strange toys as these.'

'No,' said the Greek, with a slight smile; 'he has the gift bestowed upon our race—a powerful intellect—and communes with nature in her darkest mysteries; but he is no wizard, though he can read the fate of men and empires in the stars.'

'By St. George! that is something like it,' began Wilfred; but Eudocia interrupted him.

'I must leave you for a moment,' she said, 'to bring my father's falcon hither: the bird is on his perch near the door, and may be seen, and perhaps stolen. I will return in an instant.'

In the meantime the horsemen had reached the cottage, and the foremost of them, Robert of Artois, paused before it. The Count of Anjou, who, falcon on wrist, immediately followed him, asked him in some surprise on what he was gazing.

'Look you, Charles,' was the reply; 'yonder is as fair a bird as knight ever possessed, and in a churl's dwelling! I will myself take it, and join you in your brave sport if the peasant will sell, give, or lend it.'

He sprang from his horse and entered the deserted apartment. No one was visible, and after making the floor ring with his mailed heel, and calling two or three times impatiently without getting any reply, he took the falcon from its perch, and was about to return with it to his steed, when the inner door opened, and a beautiful peasant girl (as he believed), observing his action, sprang forward, exclaiming eagerly,

'What would you do? It is my father's falcon! oh, shame!—a knight, and steal a poor man's only solace!'

For an instant Robert of Artois, as well as his brother and two or three knights, who had also dismounted and entered the

dwelling, stood gazing in silent and admiring surprise on the radiant face and graceful form before them; the next minute, smiling at his own folly, he answered her :

‘It is scarce courteous, pretty maiden, to accuse a Prince of France of such a vulgar crime. I called till I was hoarse to learn if any one here would sell me the bird, or lend it to me, and, finding I could get no reply, I was about to borrow it for a brief season. You will not say me nay, I am sure.’

‘Noble Count,’ said the girl, ‘my father is absent, and I dare not lend it; he will not, I know, sell it.’

‘Will not, and dare not!’ cried the prince, with all his usual impetuosity. ‘Is this the training that Henry of Lusignan gives his villeins? What does the base-born churl with a bird fit for a king’s pastime? He should deem it honour enough to train and rear it for his masters—ay, and be thankful for the gold they offer him in return.’

‘Be wise, and sell it to the prince, pretty damsel,’ said one of the strangers in a low voice; ‘he is generous, and will pay you well for it.’

‘I cannot—nay, I will not sell it,’ repeated Eudocia, nearly as passionately as the Count himself. The royal blood of Greece boiled in her veins, but she could not tell *them* she was no churl’s daughter. She felt that they would laugh at her poverty and low estate.

‘Then, my uncivil mistress,’ said the Count, ‘we will not ask your leave, but take the good falcon for our disport, and return it or not as it likes us. Your father has no more right to it than to wear gilt spurs.—By my faith, these knave peasants will strive to be our masters some day,’ he added to Anjou.

The future Lord of Sicily answered only by one of his dark and scornful smiles, and Artois turned haughtily towards the

door, but Eudocia suddenly caught his mantle and detained him, her large dark eyes suffused with tears, though her cheeks glowed with indignation, exclaiming passionately,

‘It is my poor father’s only comfort—all he has left to remind him of what his fathers were. Take it not from him, if you would not give another pang to one whose destiny is most wretched!’

Robert of Artois scarcely understood the meaning of her words, but he was touched by her tears and distress.

‘Well, then,’ he said, ‘I will yield my captive; but you must ransom it.’

He replaced the falcon on its perch, and catching her in his arms, was about to kiss her lips—he meant it as a kind of apology for having distressed her; she was a peasant girl and he a prince, and he thought he was conferring an honour—when she uttered a wild and piercing scream, and at the moment, with the spring of an enraged tiger, Wilfred de Lucy sprang through the passage doorway, and with a blow of his clenched fist lay the slight, graceful form of Count Robert on the earth, and clasped the frightened Eudocia closely to his side. An exclamation of astonishment and rage burst from the knights, but Artois was again on his feet, and, mad with rage at the insult, drew his dagger, and rushed on his rash assailant. Even the interposing form of Eudocia would not have saved Wilfred, had not Charles of Anjou thrown his arms round his brother and held him forcibly in his powerful grasp. But whilst he thus restrained his struggling brother, the Count’s deep voice was raised, commanding his followers in a stern, collected tone, to ‘secure the English traitor, bind him on a horse, and carry him before them to Limisso.’ His orders were obeyed, and Wilfred, well knowing that resistance would be vain, and shud-



dering for an instant as he thought of his future fate, placed the young Greek, who was half-stupefied with terror, on a seat, pressed his lips to her forehead, and turning to the knights, said calmly, 'I am ready, sirs.'

The moment that they had departed, Artois was released by his stalwart brother, not without bestowing on him a string of angry reproaches, 'that he had prevented him from redressing his injured honour.'

Charles listened calmly, and when Robert was silent from complete exhaustion, answered,

'Artois, you might have slain him for me, had he been any other than he is; but know you not that this insolent boy is the favourite esquire of the Earl of Salisbury? a near kinsman, too, of Sir Walter de Lucy? It would have been a triumph to the proud islanders to blazen forth amongst their rude knaves, and the sleek Hospitallers and haughty Templars, that Louis's own brother had been the first to break the peace of the united crusade, and in a foolish quarrel for a hawk had slain an esquire—for they would not have spoken *all* the truth. Now his doom is sealed. They cannot say that he has injustice done him, when the punishment for an esquire striking a knight is inflicted on him.'

'What! the loss of his hand?' exclaimed D'Artois, with a shudder, and turning pale; 'I would you had let me slay him, Charles, in my wrath. He deserved it, and it would have been more merciful. By my soul, I forgive and pity the hot-headed lad now I am cool. Perhaps I should have done the same in his place.'

He looked pityingly towards Eudocia, who sat still, mute, pale, and motionless, where Wilfred had placed her, and then making a hasty stride towards her, he said,

'I am sorry for you, maiden, and as far as may consort with mine honour, I will seek to save your young lover from the consequences of his folly. A plague upon your pretty face!' he muttered to himself, as he walked from her and left the cottage; 'you have marred a brave spirit's fortune, and may do no little injury to the speeding of my suit with Cicely, if she hear of my folly.'

He mounted his horse, and rode away in sullen silence, reluctantly complying with the desire of Anjou, that they should pursue their sport, and not suffer so slight and contemptible a cause as the insolence of a malapert boy to interrupt it. One of the knights, a very young and good-hearted Provençal, lingered for a moment after the others, and gazed with much compassion on the Greek girl. She saw it, and signed to him to approach her. He obeyed as reverentially as if she had been an empress.

'What would you, my poor maiden?' he asked, gently.

She looked up in his face; it was impossible not to confide in its frank and sympathizing expression.

'Thank you for your kindness,' she said, in a low, hoarse voice. 'Tell me, good stranger, for the love of Heaven, what will they do to him? Did he not say—that rude, proud knight—that he must lose his hand?'

'Such is in very truth the law, my poor damsel,' replied the knight; 'but the King has full power of pardon. He may be forgiven.'

'I will go straight to him, tell him all, and ask him to forgive my Wilfred,' she said, rising, and pressing her hand to her brow; 'they tell me Louis is good and just; he will listen to the truth.'

'Nay,' said her new friend, 'you could not see the King today; but perhaps your intercession may avail with Artois him-

self: he is of a generous though fiery nature, and may aid you. Yet how, I hardly see,' he continued in a low tone to himself. 'Come to Limisso to-morrow—his anger never lasts a night—and ask for me at the auberge called the "Angel." I will conduct you to him in safety.'

'A thousand blessings for your kindness,' sobbed the now weeping Eudocia, 'courteous and gentle knight. By what name shall I remember you in my prayers?'

'My name is Regnier d'Arcy,' he said, with a smile full of cheering and kindness. 'And now farewell, my pretty child. Hope on; all may yet be well.'

He had his reward in the expression of the beautiful face that was turned towards him, as he left the cottage and rode slowly after his companions. He joined them, and had to endure their heartless banter at his 'new character,' as they called it, 'of comforter of distressed damsels.' But he bore it laughingly, and they, satisfied with their own superiority in selfishness—it is strange that many rejoice in the exhibition of that unlovable quality, and appear to think it a proof of their extraordinary sagacity—rode gaily on in his company, dreaming not that he was of the few who may yet reconcile the attendant spirits that minister to the children of earth to their office—that he was raised above his comrades, and above the mere spirit of his age, not by high intellect or courage, though he possessed both, but by that which is at all times the rarest and most heaven-like of man's good gifts—a generous and totally unselfish heart.

The usual unbroken stillness reigned around the cottage when Paul Comnenus that evening returned home, and his child welcomed him with her usual affection; but her gay smile was gone, her cheek was pale, and the very tone of her voice had undergone a change since he last heard it. He asked her anxiously,

'What ailed her? was she ill?' and there was so unusual a tenderness in his manner, that Eudocia could not find courage to tell him (as she had resolved) the whole truth, lest she should see the love that soothed her converted into angry hatred, and draw down upon herself a curse where now a blessing awaited her. In a few hurried words she accounted for her pale looks by the intrusion of the morning, and the rude bearing of the French prince; she dwelt also on the courage of an English youth—a mere boy—who had defended her from insult; but anxious to avert her father's suspicions from him, continued hurriedly, and with a flushed cheek, to relate the sudden change of Artois from furious anger to generous pity for his foe—and there she paused. Paul was also silent for a moment, and then asked his daughter, looking earnestly in her face as he spoke, whether the Count d'Artois was the stern, dark-looking prince, of a marvellous ill favour, whom he had occasionally met in Limisso? The negative he received in reply, and the assurance Eudocia gave him, that Robert of Artois was tall, and graceful, and handsome, brought a frown on his brow, and he partook of his evening meal in silence. When it was over, he rose, and bade Eudocia go to rest, as she must be ready at daybreak to accompany him to Limisso.

'We shall henceforth dwell in the city, my child,' he said, in answer to her look of surprise, 'till these ill-nurtured Franks have left our island. I had made arrangements to do so before my return, but the visit of our princely guest is too great an honour to bear repetition; therefore our departure shall be immediate.'

He little thought that he was fulfilling his daughter's most earnest, and, as she deemed, vainest wish—that her heart was already in Limisso. Eudocia hailed the resolution (which seconded her hopes of saving Wilfred, by her intercession with

King Louis) as a good omen, and with reviving courage sought her pillow, to dream of, or weep for, her unfortunate English lover. Paul stood for a few moments lost in deep and anxious thought after she withdrew. He roused himself from his reverie with a deep sigh.

'It is a dream, a vision,' he said: 'the son of Louis of France will never wed a beggar, the descendant of a ruined family! No, I will prevent her ever seeing him again, and even if he has caught her young fancy, he will soon be forgotten, and she will wed the Venetian, to whom I have promised her, with a light heart. It is time she knew him now as her destined husband, for methinks she had a fear, a childish awe of him, when last he visited us. But let me consult the voiceless oracles of the heavens, and see what they threaten or promise me.'

He passed the greater part of the night in his study, and the stars apparently flattered his own views and passions, for there was an expression of satisfaction in his keen and brilliant eyes and on his chiselled lip as he came forth from it.

It was scarcely daybreak, when his deep voice roused Eudocia from her unquiet slumbers, and bade her prepare for their departure; and they were on the journey before the sun had fully risen. The Greek girl looked sadly back upon the home she now left for the first time, and then asked her father, who bore her on a pillion behind him, 'how long he thought it would be before they returned?'

'Not till the spring, perhaps,' was the reply; 'this snowball of an army will probably go on increasing in size till then, and seek its doom at the appointed time.'

'Its doom, my father!' said Eudocia, in a tone of irrepressible anxiety, for her faith in the predictions of the astrologer was boundless; 'do you foresee defeat or misfortune awaiting it?'

‘Ay, child! Pestilence and dissension, flood and defeat, captivity and death!’

Could Paul have seen how deadly pale his daughter grew as she listened to his words, he would have felt convinced of the truth of his erroneous belief that the Count d’Artois had won her youthful fancy.

‘But, father,’ she said, eagerly, ‘you will surely warn them of the evil—you will surely not let the stars speak in vain?’

‘I should but incur the fate of Cassandra of Troy, in their ignorant and half-civilized host,’ he replied, scornfully; ‘and if I could, I have no wish to save the brainsick fools, who have ever been the oppressors and foes of my house, from the fate they have themselves sought.’

‘But they are the friends of our King,’ urged Eudocia, timidly; ‘if they win Jerusalem from the infidel, its crown will be Henry de Lusignan’s.’

‘Our King!’ said Paul, almost fiercely; ‘let me not hear a daughter of the Comneni give that title to one of the Lusignans. How came they Kings of Cyprus? Through the agency of the tyrant Richard—through the disgrace and ruin of our family! Rather should I rejoice that fate helps me to revenge, than seek to avert their destiny by one word of warning. Let them perish in the prison, and beneath the scimitar of the Moslem, in the height of their pride and vainglory! It is well that the earth should be rid of them.’

It was some time before Eudocia dared again to address her father; at length she ventured to ask him, ‘in what part of Limisso their new abode was?’

‘You will be lodged in the house of mine excellent friend, the Signor Ludovico of Venice. You remember him, Eudocia, do you not?’

'The grave, dark-looking stranger, who was with us in the spring?' replied the Greek. 'Oh! yes; I remember how I used to dislike him, and feel half afraid of his large black eyes and heavy frown.'

She shuddered as she spoke.

'You speak like a foolish child,' said Paul, in a tone of displeasure. 'I would advise you not to judge by outward seeming, but to show all courtesy to my friend and host, who is noble, wealthy, and honours such a puppet by deigning to look at her.'

Eudocia did not answer, but during the remainder of their ride employed her thoughts in drawing a comparison between the Venetian and the English squire, greatly to the disadvantage of the former, who certainly did not diminish her dislike by receiving her with a distinction which, in an instant, brought the conviction to her mind, that he was destined for her future husband. The house of the wealthy Venetian might have reconciled her to such a fate if splendour could have done so, for all the known luxuries of the East and West were congregated in its narrow confines; but Eudocia beheld it with indifference, and seated herself sadly near a window that looked into a courtyard in the centre of the building, longing for the arrival of her nurse (who was to follow them), without whose assistance she felt it would be impossible to put any of her plans into execution.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

## THE SENTENCE.

How! will she none? doth she not give us thanks?  
 Is she not proud? doth she not count her blest,  
 Unworthy as she is, that we have wrought  
 So worthy a gentleman to be her bridegroom?

SHAKSPEARE.

THAT day the city of Limisso was in a tumult. Its warlike visitants incessantly hurried backwards and forwards to the palace, where King Louis and his royal host, Henry de Lusignan, held a kind of military court and council; at which they first received the ambassadors from a Tartar prince, who came to proffer to Louis the alliance and friendship of the infidel, and afterwards sat in judgment on the unfortunate Wilfred de Lucy. Amongst the crowd in the streets were Paul Comnenus and his friend the Venetian, both deeply interested in the fate of the English squire; for, in spite of his implacable aversion to that nation, Paul could not refrain from anxiously desiring the acquittal of his daughter's brave young champion, though from the words he at times gathered from the crowd, he believed the case hopeless. It was difficult to approach the royal residence, so dense was the throng, and Ludovico de Trevisi and his friend were about to abandon the attempt, when a rush forward made by the crowd left an opening for a moment. The cause of this movement was soon evident. The Tartar envoys had come forth from the audience, and, attended by a swarthy train of attendants and an escort of the King of Cyprus's body-guard, were returning to their temporary dwelling in the city. The Venetian and the Greek exchanged glances, as the pro-



cession passed on, and the rabble, greedy of novel spectacles, pressed after it, leaving a road free towards the royal palace.

'Think you these strangers are what they seem?' asked Paul, in a low voice. A scornful smile curled the lip of the Vneetian.

'Our Venice is the mart of all the world,' he said, in answer; 'we have even seen the subjects of the Gran Cane in the piazza of San Marco; but if I may judge from some two or three specimens of his people, yonder shaggy strangers, grim and fierce as it pleases them to look, are more like the dwellers in Mount Lebanon than the subjects of the Tartar chief.'

'You deem them spies, then, Ludovico?'

'Ay; but it matters not to the crusaders. Their force is large enough to awe the Moslem by the mere report of its numbers, and the occasion for a display of his piety and zeal for the conversion of the infidels will be gladly seized by Louis of France, who is as priest-ridden as he is brave and honest. We will ask the particulars of the audience from the first knight with whom I have any acquaintance. They will all come forth as soon as the young squire's trial is over.'

It was some time before the members of the council and those present at the trial returned from the palace. The first knight who issued from the avenue of limes rode at full gallop, followed by a few attendants, but in the passing glimpse Paul Comnenus caught of his face, which was stern and frowning, he recognized the English leader.

'William of Salisbury,' said the Venetian, 'in haste and anger. When will the English bulldogs and the curs of France kennel together in harmony?'

'The judgment of France goes against the young Englishman, I fear,' said Paul, 'from the scowl on Salisbury's brow; but here come more of the gallants.'

The Count d'Artois, his brother, and several knights rode forth as he spoke, and some minutes afterwards came the prisoner Wilfred de Lucy, guarded by a body of men-at-arms, who by their dress were Burgundians. A young knight then rode up to the youth and held a few moments' conference with him, probably offering him consolation, for as he turned away from him his handsome features wore an expression of generous sympathy. His face was known to Ludovico, who, advancing towards him, greeted him with gay familiarity—even the grave merchant-noble relaxing from his usual reserve for Sir Regnier d'Arcy. The young knight frankly returned his salutation, and bowed courteously to his companion.

'What news, Sir Regnier?' asked Ludovico, as Regnier walked his horse beside them down the now crowded street. 'What have the King and princes resolved to do with this unlucky boy?'

'Marry, Messer Ludovico,' answered the Provençal, 'I fear it will go hard with him. After the proclamation for the better enforcement of discipline and concord in the army of the Cross, Louis cannot in justice overlook so gross a breach of the laws of chivalry. The sentence passed on him is, that he shall lose his hand: at the intercession of my Lord of Salisbury—who is much grieved at the untoward event—the execution of the sentence is delayed till the day after to-morrow. 'T is but according to the old law of chivalry, Messires,' he continued; 'yet it is a great and fearful punishment.'

'And what says Louis to his brother's conduct? Does he approve the rude discourtesy that this Count of Artois exercised towards a noble maiden?' demanded Paul, sternly.

'Your pardon, fair sir,' said D'Arcy, 'you have been misinformed; the girl who caused this catastrophe was a peasant.'

'And was she not a woman—alone, helpless, and unprotected? Methinks her sex should have ensured her courtesy from even the rude chivalry of the barbarous West,' said Paul, bitterly.

'You are probably a Cypriot, and are naturally enraged at an affront offered to your countrywoman,' replied the knight; 'but believe me, Louis neither justifies nor approves it. The Count d'Artois has had a very sharp rebuke from the King, in the presence of the assembled leaders, and the knights have been strictly prohibited from entering, on any pretext, the dwellings of the peasantry.—When are our supplies from Venice to arrive, good signor?' he added, turning to Ludovico, as if anxious to change the subject.

'With the first fair wind,' answered the Venetian; 'doubt it not, Sir Knight. You have had strange visitors at the palace to-day—Tartars, they tell me! What answer gave King Louis to their suit, if it be allowable to ask you?'

'T is no secret, worthy Signor Ludovico: they were envoys from the Khan of—of—a plague upon the heathenish name! it has escaped my memory—and brought their chief's submission to the Leader of Christendom, and an offer of alliance and friendship.'

'And what answer gave the King?'

'He is disposed to listen to their proposals, seeing they are not Moslems, like the dog Saracens—worshipping neither Mahound nor Termagaunt, but holding all faiths in equal reverence—and he, King Louis, has determined on sending two black monks (who speak their language) with embroidered representations of the mysteries of Christianity, to convert the Khan and his people, who will then be useful allies to the King of Jerusalem.'

'When he has regained his crown,' added Ludovico, in a low voice and with a repressed smile. 'Thanks for your news, Sir

Knight. Will it please you return with us to my poor house, and partake of supper with us ?'

'I may not have the pleasure now,' said Regnier, 'as I have an appointment with a friend at the auberge where I lodge. A good even to you, gentlemen.'

He touched his mettled steed, and was out of sight in a moment.

When Paul and his host reached the Venetian's house, the old nurse of Eudocia met them, and informed her master that her mistress was fatigued and would not leave her chamber that evening. Paul Comnenus bade her take good care of her charge, and followed his host to the apartment where supper had been prepared. They were engaged in doing justice to the skill of the Venetian's Asiatic cook, when two closely-muffled figures issued from a side door of the mansion, and took their way through the now deserted streets towards that part of the city in which the 'Angel' inn was situated. Their course was directed by a negro boy, who made them understand his directions by signs ; for the nurse had discreetly chosen from the Venetian's household a dumb guide for their enterprise, making the domestics believe that she was going forth on needful business whilst her lady slept. And old and feeble as she was, and sorrowing for her beloved child's grief, her arm nevertheless supported the trembling form of Eudocia in their progress through this new world to her—a populous city.

They reached the auberge safely, and, on inquiring for the knight, were instantly admitted to the apartment in which Regnier d'Arcy had been for some time expecting them. He approached Eudocia, and led her to a seat with as much respectful courtesy as if she had been a princess of acknowledged rank, though altogether ignorant of her really high descent ; and

pouring out some wine of Cyprus in a silver goblet, entreated her, as tenderly as if she had been his sister, to drink it.

'Tell me, kind, good stranger,' she exclaimed, as soon as she could speak, 'tell me where is Wilfred de Lucy? Is he safe? What will be his fate?'

'He is safe, and it may be his sentence will be averted,' he said, hesitatingly; 'but moments are precious, maiden, now. You must come at once with me, and plead with Count d'Artois for him if you would aid him. The prince's temper has been roused to-day by the King's reproof, publicly given, and the repressed yet visible scorn of the English knights. But he is generous of heart withal, and will not reject your prayers.'

'Can he pardon Wilfred?' asked the Greek girl, fixing her dark eyes anxiously upon Regnier's countenance.

'Not himself, damsel, but he can do much with Louis, frequently influencing the King, even against his better judgment. Or he may introduce you to the royal presence, to offer your supplication to his Grace in person. He can at all times obtain access to his brother.'

'Let us go to him immediately,' said the girl, rising, as if inspired with a new strength.

Count Robert of Artois sat in a chamber of the palace alone. He held a lute in his hand, for he was a lover and a skilful disciple of the troubadour's art, but he struck it only at intervals, producing a jarring and discordant sound, in unison, perhaps, with his own frame of mind. He was angry with his brother—with the leader of the English allies, and, which was far worse to bear—with himself. A rap at the door roused him from this disagreeable reverie, and he desired the applicant to enter, in a harsh voice that promised little favour for his suit, if he had one to proffer.

‘How now, D’Arcy! what is the matter?’ he asked quickly, as his favourite entered.

‘So please you, Sir Count,’ answered Regnier, ‘there is a fair demoiselle without, who craves the favour of a word with you.’

‘I am at her command, Regnier,’ replied the courteous prince. ‘Beg the lady to honour my poor chamber with her presence.’

D’Arcy left the room, and in a few moments returned, ushering in two closely-muffled figures.

Timidly advancing, the taller of the two threw back her hood and knelt at the feet of the Count, who, as soon as he caught sight of the pale, beautiful face of Eudocia Comnena, started back and uttered an exclamation of impatience and surprise.

‘Why, in the fiend’s name, D’Arcy,’ he exclaimed, ‘did you bring this screaming wench hither? Hath she not done enough mischief already?’

‘Too much, too much, royal sir,’ said the girl, preventing the reply of her protector. ‘My foolish fear has lured a noble and brave youth to a fate, worse perhaps than death—it may be to death itself. But, oh! Count Robert, for the sake of your own honour, of your own peace of mind hereafter, save him, I beseech you! I am not a low-born peasant,’ she continued, proudly, ‘but a descendant of that Isaac who once wore the crown of Cyprus. We are poor, but honest; and, alas! I thought rather of my noble blood and of the honour of our house, when my wild scream brought the gallant Wilfred to his ruin, than of my supposed condition. Think if you had been in his place, noble Artois, what you would have done for an insulted lady? Be generous, and intercede for your rash young assailant!’

She was silent, but her eyes eloquently appealed to the impressionable and generous French prince. He had risen, and

now with a flushed cheek assured her that it was not by his wish Wilfred should receive other chastisement than he himself meant to have inflicted.

'For,' he continued, proudly, 'I am the guardian of my own honour; but the offence had been public, and Count Charles of Anjou deemed it needful, for the better preservation of discipline, that the lad should be tried and punished publicly. I am powerless to aid you, lady. The silly boy is beyond my power, either to save or punish.'

'No, no! royal Robert,' cried Eudocia, eagerly; 'your intercession with King Louis would surely save him. You know well how much the King loves you. He will not refuse your request. If you would not see me die at your feet, you will try to save my Wilfred.' And bending towards the ground, she sobbed bitterly.

He raised her, gently but forcibly.

'I *will* intercede with Louis for him, lady,' he said, with emotion; 'I will do all man may to save him. Be comforted, and pardon me the folly which caused all this misery. Go home, sweet lady, and trust me I will plead your cause earnestly with my brother. I will go to him at once, and to-morrow Sir Regnier d'Arcy will bring you, I hope, the news of my success.'

Eudocia murmured her thanks in a voice rendered inarticulate by emotion, and then, still escorted by Sir Regnier (who was desired by Artois to return when his charge was in safety), left the impetuous but generous prince, who instantly proceeded on his errand of mercy.

At the 'Angel' the maiden found her mute guide; and refusing the further protection of the young Provençal, bade him gratefully adieu. He followed her to ask where she dwelt, that he might bring her early tidings of the fate of Wil-

fred; but she told him, blushing, that she dared receive no visitors at De'Trevisi's house. 'I will be at the vesper service to-morrow, in the church of St. John', she said; 'it is close to my present dwelling-place; and if you, Sir Knight, will be there, I will linger after the service, to bless you, I hope, for the tidings you will bring me.'

D'Arcy promised to comply with her wish, and to meet her at the church, and they parted, Sir Regnier retracing his steps to the palace.

'You have succeeded, my good lord!' he exclaimed, as, after he had been waiting some time, the Count D'Artois entered, his eyes sparkling with eager animation.

'I *will* succeed in saving the poor boy, Regnier,' replied the prince, 'though Louis is deaf to my entreaties—ay, and to Queen Marguerite's also; for I went first to her, and told her the whole truth, and her Grace accompanied me to the King's chamber, and added her entreaties to mine own, but in vain. Louis is firm: he has said "nay" to the English Longespée, and to Sir Walter de Lucy, who, after joining in passing sentence on this unlucky boy, had sued for the royal pardon, and the King thinks that he cannot yield to the entreaties of his own family with honour. Besides, his Grace says that it would destroy all military discipline if so great an offence were overlooked.'

'Then there is no hope for the poor lad?' said Regnier, sadly.

'So I thought at first myself; but with the aid of woman's never-failing wit, we shall, I hope, save him. I have obtained a pass from the King, permitting myself and an attendant to visit the prisoner at any hour. It was all he would grant me, but will suffice; for hear the Queen's plot! Her Grace suggests that I should exchange dresses with the youth, who is of my own



height, and, sending him forth in my armour, take his place in the prison till he be in safety. I am the person least likely to be suspected of favouring this young upstart, and may also best endure the brief anger of the King.'

'T is generously purposed, my good lord,' said Regnier, with animation; 'but what then is to be done with the escaped captive?'

'Ah, *ma belle sœur* has also planned that. You know his Grace purposes sending off two black priests with the Tartar envoys, to-morrow or the next day; the young De Lucy must take a similar dress, and paint his skin of their colour; he may then go on board their vessel unsuspected, and, once free, his own courage and wit must find him a mode of returning to his distant island. Sir Walter de Lucy, his kinsman, is to be made cognizant of his escape, and must provide the means of disposing of him afterwards.'

'A good plot, my lord,' said the knight. 'In England the esquire will not be coldly looked on, or prevented from pursuing the profession of arms, because he has insulted a French knight.'

The angry glow upon the cheek of the Count d'Artois made Regnier instantly regret his thoughtless speech.

'No,' said the prince, indignantly, 'the barbarous islanders would rather applaud him for it. But he leaves not his prison till he has pledged me his word to do all man may to win his spurs; and then (when the obstacle to my meeting him fairly in the lists, his inferior military grade, is removed) he shall swear to seek me wherever I may be, and give me in the lists the atonement due to my honour.'

The young knight made no answer, but after receiving some few instructions from his leader as to his own part in the enterprise, withdrew.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

ROBERT OF ARTOIS.

But love is blind, and lovers cannot see  
 The pretty follies they themselves commit ;  
 For if they could, Cupid himself would blush  
 To see me thus transforméd to a boy.

SHAKSPEARE.

WEARILY passed the hours of that night to the young prisoner in his lonely cell. The bright hopes with which he had left the home of his fathers, his lofty aspirations for renown, appeared destined to end only in a dishonourable mutilation ; and he imaged to his fevered fancy the horror of coming forth a spectacle to the army of the Cross, and to the inhabitants of the strange land in which he sojourned ; the standing beneath the burning sun with all those unknown or (far worse,) friendly faces turned to him, with looks of wonder, or scorn, or pity ; the sorrowful reproof on the brow of his noble and beloved leader ; the shame on that of his proud kinsman ; the axe of the brutal executioner, the agony of the blow, the searing of the stump with red hot iron ! He hid his eyes in his hands, as if he would shut out the picture his imagination had portrayed. His excuse for the rash act for which he was to suffer could be but imperfectly known, for he had said nothing in his own defence, lest he should compromise the name of Eudocia. His thoughts then reverted to his mother ; to his noble mother, who would have gloried in his championship of a female of gentle birth, but who would indignantly resent his mixing in what would appear to her a brawl about a peasant wench : he had seen the expression of such a feeling

on the countenances of Salisbury and of Sir Walter de Lucy, and he knew well it expressed the common opinion (he did not call it prejudice) of his age. Such were the thoughts that banished sleep from his eyelids, and made the long dreary night appear endless. Daylight had glided into the narrow loophole ere exhaustion gave him the relief of slumber, and then so heavily did it fall on him, that the sun was high in the heavens when he awoke from a dream of the old tower by the Northern Sea, and the gentle mother and young companions of his childhood.

‘It was a dream,’ he said, sadly, as he slowly rose from his pallet-bed; ‘I awake to a terrible reality. I am a prisoner, a dishonoured culprit, an object for the executioner to try his horrible skill on! Why did they defer my punishment? The expectation of it must surely be worse than the reality.’

His jailer now entered the cell, and told him that the Earl of Salisbury and Sir Walter de Lucy would be with him in about an hour.

‘The noble Earl bade me tell you, Sir Squire, that he should have come earlier this morning, had not the King required his presence.’

Wilfred thanked him, and endeavoured to compose his mind to receive the reproaches or condolences his visitors might offer, with the calmness his boyish pride desired to exhibit. But his heart beat fast, and his colour rose when the great Earl, looking grave and sad, and his bluff kinsman, Sir Walter, entered his prison.

‘Soh! nephew Scatterbrains,’ said the northern knight, as Wilfred greeted them respectfully, ‘a pretty pass you are come to! You will be fit henceforward for nought but that which in truth befits your folly—a jester’s bauble and cap. What in the

fiend's name made you strike a prince of France for kissing a silly moppet of a peasant wench?'

'I could not see a woman insulted with impunity,' was Wilfred's evasive reply.

'Insulted, thou foolish varlet! How long has it been an insult for a prince or gallant gentleman to kiss a nief? Hast thou never been guilty of like insults to the rosy damsels of Northumberland? A pretty pass the world is coming to, if such low-born wenches are to have their champions, forsooth, like any gentle dame! Say you not so, my Lord of Salisbury?'

'I think with Wilfred,' replied William Longsword, 'that no woman should appeal to a gentleman for aid in vain; but methinks the Count D'Artois' foolish jest, for such it appears to have been, scarcely deserved so rude a chastisement. I fear me, dear lad,' he continued to the squire, 'that your foolish anger at this French prince's insolence to myself was the true cause of this unhappy quarrel?'

'Nay, not so, I assure you, my good lord,' replied Wilfred. 'I acted on the impulse of the moment, and confess I thought not of the former hostility of the Count D'Artois to yourself. I would I had better imitated your lordship's forbearance.'

'The deed is past recall, and it is therefore vain to reproach you, Wilfred; but remember, that he who governs his own spirit is greater than he who takes a city. This French prince possesses many noble and knightly qualities, but they are marred by his ungovernable impetuosity, which daily threatens to break the unity so necessary for our enterprise. Pray Heaven that it bring not misfortune and defeat upon our arms.'

'Dost fear thy punishment, Wilfred?' asked his kinsman, abruptly.

'Fear it, my honoured uncle!' exclaimed the youth, indig-

nantly. 'Am I not a De Lucy? I would there had been no other possibility of doing discredit to the name but want of courage; I had not then subjected one of our race to the pollution of an executioner's touch.'

'We are trying, Wilfred, to get your sentence commuted to imprisonment for a time, or to a long probation before your knighthood,' said Salisbury, kindly. 'The fair Queen Marguerite has promised her intercession, and we are all plying Louis hard with entreaties; but I would have you prepare for the worst, as disappointed hope gives, perhaps, a more bitter pang than the certainty of despair. Be of good cheer, dear youth: we will leave you now, that we may the better serve you.'

He extended his hand, which the youth pressed to his lips.

'Farewell, Wilfred,' said his uncle, also rising to depart. 'Keep up your courage, lad, and if you must have your hand chopped off, bear it as a De Lucy ought—boldly and cheerfully, and eschew peasant damsels for the future.'

They left him, but his solitude was of brief duration; for a few minutes afterwards the jailer again opened the door of his cell, and two knights entered, one of whom Wilfred instantly recognized as Sir Regnier of Provence; the other wore his visor down; but as Wilfred advanced to greet them, he raised it, and displayed the features of the Count d'Artois.

'You start, Sir Squire, to see me here,' said the prince, with more than his usual haughtiness; 'nor do I marvel at your wonder. But I am come to offer you an escape from mutilation on one single condition, which, if you have the spirit of a gentleman, you will not refuse.'

'If consistent with my honour, I will willingly accept it, prince,' replied the young Englishman, with a proud composure which well became him.

'It is briefly this,' continued his strange visitor, in the same stern tone in which he had first addressed him: 'you shall pledge me your honour that, when free, you will seek to win knighthood as speedily as may be. Gallant deeds (and of such I believe you capable), will give you your gold spurs in a year: you want but so much time to complete one and twenty, I believe?'

Wilfred bowed assent.

'By that time we shall perchance be again in France; but, if not, you must promise, on the honour of a gentleman, that you will seek me in the East, and give me an opportunity of redressing my injured honour in the lists.'

'On these terms—so easy, so honourable—does King Louis pardon my offence?' exclaimed the esquire, with astonishment.

'King Louis knows nothing of the matter. For the good of all, he cannot pardon your offence. But if you consent to my demands, I purpose to change dresses with you, and remain in your prison while you escape. You can easily deceive the jailer, as you are of my height, and I wore my visor down on entering.'

'Generous prince!' exclaimed the young De Lucy, with emotion. 'Forgive me my misjudging you—my rash violence. I accept right willingly your noble offer, and will seek you all over the earth to have the honour of a combat with you, and give you the satisfaction you demand. This I swear, by St. George!'

'It is enough,' said Count Robert. 'Thou wilt prove a worthy foe, I doubt not, and I shall joy to meet thee gallantly in the lists in mortal strife. Now, haste thee, and don my harness, for thou must be at the church of St. John, at vesper service, to meet this Greek princess who has chosen to assume the garb of a peasant.'

'The Lady Eudocia!' exclaimed Wilfred.

'Ay, the Lady Eudocia, who was a suppliant to me yester-eve again, for a wilder and more unreclaimed bird than a falcon. You must win her to pardon my rudeness to the supposed peasant girl, De Lucy, for in my surprise last night I believe I forgot to ask it.'

'You may command much more, my good lord,' said Wilfred; 'you will have her lasting gratitude for your present generosity; but—' (he asked with hesitation) 'will not my escape in this fashion expose you to the displeasure of the King?'

'For a day or two perchance it may,' was the careless reply; 'but the royal wrath is not very difficult to appease. I can well endure it,' he continued, with a smile. 'Now hasten and make the exchange of garments. D'Arcy will give you further instructions for your escape when you are clear of the prison.'

The exchange was made, and though a trifle shorter and stouter than the prince, the English esquire wore the knight's armour with a good grace.

'I pray you, Regnier,' said the Count Robert, as he seated himself on the prisoner's couch, 'to see Queen Marguerite to-night, and bid her remember her poor captive in her prayers. And remember I have no taste for long solitary confinement.'

'I will come to you at daybreak, my good lord,' replied the knight; 'I hope your thralldom will be but brief.'

'Your speedy departure will hasten its termination, therefore accept my adieux, gentlemen,' said the prince, lightly. 'When we next meet, Master de Lucy, let the gold spurs be your own.'

Wilfred approached the Count d'Artois, knelt, and taking the prince's hand, pressed it with much emotion to his lips.

'Farewell, generous prince,' he said; 'the remembrance of your noble conduct shall light me to glory, that I may be a

worthy antagonist for my gallant foe. May success follow your banner !'

They passed out unquestioned by the jailer, who had marvelled what brought Count Robert to the prison of his foe, and whose wonder was increased by the beneficial effects which the prince's visit had had on the spirits of the prisoner, who, after the departure of his visitors, was heard walking his cell, and singing scraps of Provençal songs with infinite cheerfulness.

Sir Walter de Lucy, who visited his captive relative again that evening, came forth, however, with a solemn countenance, and begged the jailer to refrain from disturbing the prisoner, who, he said, 'was giving his remaining hours till day-dawn to prayer, in order that he might the better undergo his punishment on the morrow.'

Eudocia's secret expedition had not been suspected by her father : he ascribed her pale cheek and sunken eyes to fatigue and indisposition, and, possibly, to her recent alarm. He called her attention to the many articles of luxury, unknown to her before, that filled the apartment, and asked her, half playfully, 'if she did not think she had made an agreeable exchange from their forest dwelling to the mansion in Limisso?'

At another time Eudocia would have greatly preferred the home of her infancy to a palace ; for she loved the old trees, and the ruined pillars, and the silent fountain, almost as well as though they had been fellow-beings ; but all her thoughts and affections were now centered in Limisso, and she assented eagerly to her father's question. He smiled—his own dark, grave smile—as he continued

'Your destiny is a happy one, Eudocia. The stars have promised you an ocean home, far from this conquered and degenerate province,—wealth, and a noble husband.'



A smile and a deep blush brightened for an instant the pale face of the Greek girl. Of what husband could she think but Wilfred de Lucy?

'And your fate is already accomplished, dear one,' added Paul, taking her hand. 'The Signor Ludovico de' Trevisi, my friend, the noble Venetian, will give you wealth, the station you have lost, and a fair home in his own proud city.'

His daughter turned, and gazed on him with a bewildered glance of fear and wonder.

'Wed him!' she gasped; 'wed Signor Ludovico?'

'Wed him? why, ay, wherefore not, thou foolish one? Does thy splendid fate dazzle or frighten thee, that thou lookest so deathlike?'

'Oh! father, father!' she exclaimed, throwing herself suddenly at his feet. 'You cannot mean it! You will not send me from you? You will not give me to that stern, dark man? You will not make your poor Eudocia wretched?'

She looked up at him imploringly, but shuddered and covered her eyes with her hands as she beheld the frightful expression of ungovernable rage which his dark features wore.

'Will *you* also thwart my purposes, disconcert my plans, make the future as dark and miserable as the past?' he exclaimed. 'Shame on you, unnatural and perverse disgrace to our royal blood! Shame on you! I know too well why the Signor Ludovico, a wealthy and an honourable gentleman, finds no favour in your eyes. Your light fancy has been caught by the arrogant fool who only saw you to offer insult to you. Shame on you for an immodest maiden!'

'Indeed, indeed, you wrong me, father,' said Eudocia, roused by his reproaches from her trance of fear: 'it is not because I have an unmaidenly and most impossible liking for the Count

d'Artois that I reject your friend, but that I cannot love him as a wife should, father, and I would not marry yet. I am very young; oh! let me dwell with you yet a little longer.'

'You cannot love him as a wife should!'—he repeated her words with bitter mockery—'and I pray you, mistress, what know you of how a wife should love? It would better befit your youth, since you are so "very young," to learn and practise the virtues of an obedient child. Now mark me,' he added, clutching her arm in his long thin fingers, with a painful clasp; 'my word is pledged to Ludovico de' Trevisi, that you shall be his wife, and it never yet has been and never shall be broken. You wed him—mark me, Eudocia—if I even carry you by force to the altar. Answer me not, but prepare to obey my will, nor dream that Paul Comnenus can be turned from his purpose by the tears of a brain-sick girl.'

He threw her from him as he ceased speaking, and when the nurse entered the room she found the unfortunate Eudocia insensible on the floor. With many tender and soothing words and cares the old woman sought to revive her mistress; but when returning colour came into her cheek, and her soft eyes opened on her affectionate attendant, the nurse was alarmed by her wild words and frightened looks. It was long before she could distinctly relate the past scene with her father, and when she did so, the poor nurse was so alarmed at the anger of the master to whom she had always looked up, and whose frown she would have shuddered to encounter, that she could only advise the maiden to yield to his will, 'for he was wise and terrible, and could tell even the secrets of the stars: she had far better try and forget the unlucky, ill-omened stranger, who had brought her nothing but trouble.'

Eudocia lay on the cushions where the nurse had placed her,

and listened with closed eyes and in silence to her words during the remainder of the day, till the sound of the bell for vespers roused her from her stunning trance of grief; then rising, she bade the old woman bring her veil and mantle.

'I will go and seek comfort in the house of God, Irene,' she said, 'for I have no hope on earth. Bid the dumb boy, who guided us last even, attend me.'

'But you will not go alone, lady?' asked the ancient attendant, anxiously.

'It is better that I should do so, nurse,' said the lady. 'I would fain not expose you to my father's wrath, which is very, very terrible.'

The nurse was quite willing to avoid so terrible a risk, and, attended only by the little mute, Eudocia departed. But she did not leave the house unseen. From the window of his counting-house her host beheld her issue from the portico, and, surprised at her walking out with no protector but the mute page, and at so late an hour, he sent at once for her attendant, to ask why she had permitted her lady to go out unattended by herself.

'My lady would not permit me to accompany her. She is only gone to vespers, most noble signor,' faltered the terrified Irene; 'and was obstinately resolved to go alone. The sweet child was ever devout, and could not hear the vesper bell with a quiet conscience unless she did its bidding. Yet she is tender of my age, and will not tax me with uncalled-for fatigue, knowing that just at present I am ill at ease.'

'It is strange she feared not to go forth with only the boy,' said the Venetian, rather communing with himself than addressing the nurse, 'and it is unsafe for her to return so late, with no guardian but the dumb Moor. I will follow her to protect her when she leaves the church. To which church is she gone?'

‘To the church of St. John,’ answered the trembling old woman.

The Venetian, briefly desiring her ‘not to allow her charge to go out alone again,’ departed in pursuit of his guest; but Eudocia was fleet of foot, and he only gained sight of her as she was in the act of entering the sacred edifice. She was kneeling in prayer when he entered the church, and unwilling to disturb her, and, perhaps also, desirous of discovering whether any other motive beside devotion had induced her to go there (for Ludovico was of a suspicious and jealous temper), he placed himself behind a pillar of the church, from whence unseen he could mark all her movements.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

## AN ESCAPE.

The prince will doom thee death  
If thou art taken : hence—be gone—away!

SHAKESPEARE.

THE vesper service was ended, and the worshippers in the church of St. John were departing, but still in a dark corner of the side aisle Eudocia Comnena knelt in prayer. Though a mere earthly motive had led her there, the words she breathed were sanctified by a trusting sincerity and childlike reliance on Him to whom she prayed. Every worldly prospect was dark before her. She trembled for her own future as well as for that of Wilfred de Lucy, and fervently besought aid from

Him who was her only stay and defence. Ludovico de' Trevisi hesitated to approach her till her devotions should be concluded, and remained on the same spot till she should rise from her knees. The last worshipper had departed, and the Venetian had just resolved on rousing Eudocia from her orisons,—his apology being the lateness of the hour and the danger of traversing the streets with so small an escort,—when the step of an armed knight resounded on the marble pavement, and turning to observe who entered the church, Ludovico beheld the well-known armour of the Count d'Artois, who, with his visor down, advanced towards the kneeling Greek. She rose at the sound of his step, and, to the amazement of her affianced husband, met him with evident eagerness and satisfaction.

'You are too good, my lord, to come yourself,' she said; 'I did not expect——'

The supposed prince raised his visor, and Eudocia beheld—but Ludovico could not—the blue eyes and bright smile of Wilfred. With a stifled exclamation of joy and surprise, the girl sank forward into his arms. Her cry was heard, her action seen by Ludovico, with mingled amazement, rage, and jealousy. . And as the young squire drew Eudocia into the cloister to converse with her without fear of interruption, Ludovico followed them, carefully avoiding observation, at first by keeping behind the pillars of the church, and when in the cloister, by remaining in the deepest shadow, from whence he could see the pair, though their words were inaudible to him.

'Thank Heaven you are safe, beloved Wilfred! I can bear all—anything, now that I know you are free,' murmured Eudocia. 'But wherefore do you wear the prince's armour? I deemed when I first saw your crest it was Count Robert himself who had brought me tidings of my friend.'

'The generous Artois is now clad in my garments and is the tenant of my prison,' replied De Lucy; and he narrated to his eager listener the artifice by which he had been delivered from thralldom. Eudocia listened with tearful gratitude, and often pressed the hand that clasped her own as if to assure herself of Wilfred's safety.

'But you are still in peril, in deadly peril,' she said, as he paused. 'Oh, do not delay! Do not tarry longer with me! Go, assume your disguise, and hasten on board the Syrian vessel, lest the deceit be detected to-night. It is worse than death to bid you leave me, but it would be a far more bitter pang to see you taken back to your prison. Fly at once, dearest Wilfred, I implore you!'

'Nay,' replied Wilfred, 'there is no danger of discovery to-night; moreover, I cannot go alone. Hear me, Eudocia. A vessel belonging to my uncle Sir Walter will follow the Syrian barque from the harbour. As soon as we are out of sight of land I am to be taken on board her, and shall sail direct for England. Bethink you, Eudocia, of the great distance that will then be interposed between us! We meet never again on earth if we part to-night. Fly with me! My gentle mother will cherish you as her own child; my elder brother will greet you with the frank kindness of his nature; and their home shall be yours till your poor Wilfred has one to offer you. 'Tis true our distant isle is cold and gloomy in comparison with your beautiful Cyprus; that it is surrounded by a stormy ocean, instead of a sea of smiles and sunshine like your own; but our hearts are warm and true, Eudocia, and we will so dearly tender you that we will soon make you forget the bright sun and myrtle bowers of the South.'

'I could leave all without a sigh for your sake, Wilfred: your

people should be my people, your mother mine. But duty forbids the thought. I also have a parent. I cannot bring down my father's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.'

'Nay, but after a time he will forgive you, Eudocia. His anger against one so fair and gentle must needs be brief. We will get a learned clerk to write to him when we are safe, my beloved, and urge him to pardon us, and to leave his dwelling in the forest for an English home. He is well skilled in much strange lore, and there be those in our England who prize it more than gold. There is a priest in Oxford who can see through stone and mortar, foretell coming events, and bring the dead up from their graves. Your father, the good Signor Paul, would delight in communing with him, and even at Court he would meet with favour, for Henry of Winchester values all scholars who are not English; and a Greek at his palace would be as a godsend to him.'

'You little guess my father's character,' said the maiden, mournfully. 'He never forgives an injury: he would starve in a desert rather than tread on English ground, or greet an English son-in-law. Moreover, he has betrothed me to a Venetian, a stern, dark man, but a wealthy merchant, through whose means he hopes to dwell in Venice with a splendour befitting his avowed and recognized rank.'

'And you would wed him, Eudocia? To gratify your father's selfish ambition you would be guilty of perjury—of falsehood in the sight of God and man?'

'Not so,' said Eudocia, weeping bitterly. 'I dream not of wedding the Signor Ludovico—I would rather sleep in my grave; but I cannot leave my father. I am his last living relative—his only hope in life.'

'Yet he would give you to another. He would force you to

wed this Venetian, and then you must leave him, as you would did you fly with me. You can only escape an odious, nay, an *impious* marriage, by flight.'

She wept still more bitterly, but did not reply.

'Eudocia, by the love you have professed for me, by the vows we have plighted, go with me! Your father may feel regret at the disappointment of his ambitious views, but he will either forgive you, or he cannot love you as he ought, and will not feel your loss.'

'I must not hear you blame my father, Wilfred,' she answered, in a low voice. 'I was wrong to complain of him, for he is my father! But I will never wed the Venetian—I will die rather—death will not be far off when you are gone.'

'Farewell, then,' said the youth, passionately: 'you do not love me, or you would not be thus obdurate. Life is of no further value to me since it must be passed apart from Eudocia. I will return to my prison and bear my doom manfully. A bandage removed from my maimed arm will free me from a false and hateful world.'

He threw her hand from him, and turned away. She stood like a statue, gazing after him with distended eyes and pale cheeks, till he was exactly opposite to the dark corner of the cloister where Ludovico de' Trevisi stood in ambush; then uttering a sudden cry, she sprang after him.

'Stay! stay, my beloved!' she almost screamed; 'I will go with thee—I am thine—thine for ever!'

The young De Lucy turned eagerly back, but instead of meeting the light form of his girlish love, he beheld opposed to him the tall, powerful Italian, glaring on him with eyes of fire—a naked sword in his hand.

'So, my good Lord of Artois,' he said, for it was too obscure



for him to distinguish Wilfred's features, and he had not, as we have said, heard their words. 'So the citizens of Limisso have to thank you for designing to steal their daughters, it appears, as well as for other favours. But the forward and unmaidenly damsel you woo is of too high a rank to be stolen with impunity. I undertake the reparation due to her sire's honour and my own. Draw and defend yourself, or die like a false traitor as you are.'

With a secret ejaculation of thankfulness that his real name was unknown to his foe, Wilfred drew his sword, and did no discredit to the character he had assumed by his masterly defence of his life against the skilful and vindictive Venetian.

Afraid of calling for assistance lest her lover should be recognized and re-conducted to his prison, Eudocia Comnena stood a breathless, horror-struck spectator of the strife. All the dreadful evils that would befall her should the Signor Ludovico's superior skill or experience in arms prevail over the valour of the young Englishman, rushed on her mind. Her father's terrible wrath, her own disgrace, the death of Wilfred—she could not draw her breath as she watched the flashing of the swords in the dim light of the cloister. Her reason became confused, and when, at last, Wilfred, panting and heated, stood beside her and pointed to his fallen foe, she answered him with a burst of wild laughter that terrified him.

He seated her on one of the carved stone seats near the door of the church, where the poor who depended on the charity of the adjoining monastery were wont to await its alms, and tried by every gentle means to soothe her and recall her senses. It was some time, however, before tears gave her relief, and even then her terror rendered her incapable of walking. A faint groan from the wounded man more effectually roused her energy than all her lover's soothing words.

‘He will die, Wilfred,’ she said, in a tone hoarse with emotion, ‘he will die if he has not speedy succour! The mute page is in the church. Send him, I beseech you, for assistance, and then let us fly. You will be taken, and now they will kill you if they find you, for fighting in a holy cloister, though it was but in self-defence! Hasten, Wilfred, I implore you!’

He obeyed her; brought the dumb page to the spot, and pointing to his bleeding master, bade him hasten for a leech; then returning to Eudocia, he took her in his arms, and bore her with as much ease as if she had been an infant, through the nearly deserted streets, till she assured him ‘she could walk, and that she trembled no longer.’ They reached in safety the auberge, where Sir Regnier d’Arcy awaited the return of his new friend, and a few hasty words explained to the knight the still greater necessity there was now for instant embarkation.

‘By my advice,’ said the Provençal, ‘the lady will conceal her beauty and her sex in the garb of a lay-brother of your assumed order, Master de Lucy: it will be her only safe course; whilst you must go and change your English red and white for a sable complexion. I do not wish that my leader should be further implicated by your mad frolics in his armour. A pretty story to reach the King’s ears to-morrow, that his brother has slain the chief *Provedditore* of our army, and given cause to the winged Lion of St. Mark to ruffle his feathers.’

‘If you think, Sir Knight, that my adventure with the Signor Ludovico may in any way injure the prince, I will tarry and bear the brunt of it myself,’ said De Lucy.

‘No, my brave lad!’ replied Sir Regnier, smiling approvingly on him, ‘Count Robert will be proved to have been in safe durance at the time, and is not answerable for the offences of his wardrobe. But you must get on board directly: you have

seriously aggravated your own danger by this unlucky affair, and every moment of delay threatens death.'

They withdrew together, and presently an attendant of d'Arcy's brought the dress of a lay brother into the room, in which the maiden equipped herself, after cutting off her luxuriant tresses with a dagger which Regnier had left on the table for the purpose. Her disguise was but just completed when her lover returned, and in spite of the fear, remorse, and shame that agitated her, Eudocia could not refrain from joining in their friend's laugh, as she gazed on the metamorphosed De Lucy's black face and stuffed figure.

'For mercy's sake, Wilfred,' said d'Arcy, smothering his laughter as they walked forth, 'keep your cowl well over your brow, to hide your bright blue eyes, which have, verily, a ghastly effect with that black skin—a proof how well Mistress Nature adapts her colours—and pout your lips a little more if you can. I am in agony lest we should meet any of our comrades, you are so vile a counterfeit. Can you not assume a more priestly waddle in your walk, befitting your straw casing?'

'I will try,' said the youth; 'but Eudocia!—she must need support, she cannot walk as quickly as we do.'

'I can, indeed I can, De Lucy,' said the girl, hastily, 'I could run, if need were!'

Sir Regnier gazed on her admiringly; and then, bending down, so that she might not hear, he said in a low voice to Wilfred,

'Where do you mean to bestow your fair young companion? She is a mere child in years. I' faith, it grieves me to see her thus cast upon the world.'

'I shall take her with me direct,' replied De Lucy, 'to England. My mother will receive and shelter her till I have a

home to offer her. She will be happier there than with her harsh sire, who would fain force her to wed the Venetian with whom I have crossed swords. Fear nought for her, noble Regnier; I will watch over her safety and honour, as a brother would over that of his twin-sister.'

'You are a good youth and a brave,' said the Provençal. 'May your future fate be prosperous!'

And he walked round beside Eudocia, and strove by kind encouragement and praises of him in whose hands she had placed the disposal of her fate, to cheer her drooping spirits.

The precautions of Sir Regnier had been admirably taken; his preparations for the esquire's escape well made. They reached the beach and the boat in safety. It was a bright moonlight night, and the sea lay in calm and unruffled beauty before them. De Lucy grasped the hand of the Provençal knight, and warmly thanking him, besought him to bear the assurance of his gratitude to the generous Count d'Artois.

'Tell him,' he said, 'that I will neither forget his benefits nor his challenge, but, as soon as the gold spurs are mine own, will seek him through Christendom or Paynimrie.'

D'Arcy promised to deliver his message, and then turned to Eudocia, who stood gazing sadly on the white buildings of Lymisso, glittering in the moonlight.

'Fare you well, pretty lady,' he said, gently; 'may you find a happy home in your new country! Your lover merits your devotion, for he has perilled much for your sake. I pray the saints that he may always as well deserve it.'

He raised her hand to his lips; then giving her to Wilfred, he lifted her into the boat, which swiftly glided towards the Syrian vessel. Sir Regnier d'Arcy watched them till they had reached their destination, and then returned slowly towards his

lodgings, meditating on the adventure in which he had been so much interested, and on the devotion and courage of the youthful Greek.

'A fair creature,' he thought, 'fair as the creation of a poet's dream. I must hasten at daybreak to the prison, to tell Count Robert of our success thus far. The saints send a fair wind before dawn, and they will be safe.'



## CHAPTER XXV.

### A DISCOVERY.

Whoe'er he be, that, in this foul proceeding,  
 Hath thus beguiled your daughter . . . .  
 And you of her, the bloody book of law  
 You shall yourself read in the bitter letter ;  
 . . . . Yea, though our proper son  
 Stood in your action.

SHAKSPEARE.

IT was yet early in the day ; the freshness of Nature awaking from repose hung on the air, and the sounds of busy life were not yet breaking the silence in which the hymn of the joyous birds ascended to the cloudless sky, as the good King Louis, with the primitive simplicity of his character and his age, walked in the splendid garden of Oriental taste and cultivation, which Henry de Lusignan had dedicated to the especial use and enjoyment of his royal guest. An expression of calm and devout meditation was marked on his noble countenance, which, with his grave religious habit, and patriarchal dignity of

mien, gave him rather the appearance of a father of the ancient Church, than the leader of an army of fierce and turbulent knights-errant. Beside him walked the *Sieur de Joinville*, in reverent silence, though it was evident that his mind was not occupied on any abstract or serious reflections, from the wandering glances he bestowed on the scene around him.

'T is a fair creation, Lord Seneschal,' said the King, breaking the lengthened silence; 'a bright and beautiful world, only disfigured and polluted by those to whom it was given to enjoy. I love the early morning, De Joinville, here and everywhere. Methinks the feelings of him who gazes on the dawning of a fair day must be somewhat similar to those with which the blessed spirits of heaven gazed on the new creation of the world. All is so freshly beautiful—so calm and undisturbed by cares and toils—so hallowed by the praise offered to the Creator, by the hymn of the birds and the incense of the flowers.'

'Your Grace speaks sooth,' replied his companion; 'the morning is the best portion of the daylight—above all, the mornings of my native Champagne. The air here wants the freshness, mingled with the sweetness, of our native breezes.'

Louis smiled.

'Nothing can equal your native province in your eyes, Sir Seneschal,' he said; 'and an amiable prejudice it is, that attaches each one to his birthplace, whatever it may be; doubtless it is a wise provision of the Maker of all things. For mine own part, I confess that, much as I admire this fair isle of the South, I prefer our ancient oaks of Vincennes to its orange groves and acacias. The spirit of man, like our trees, seems to me of a firmer and nobler quality in our more northern lands. The subjects of our kind host, the royal Lusignan, are as in-

ferior to my brave Frenchmen, or to my brother of England's hardy islanders, as his orange groves are to our oaks.'

'Yes, on mine honour,' replied De Joinville; then after a pause he added, 'To-day, the malapert squire of William of Salisbury is to suffer his punishment. The commonalty are ever greedy of such spectacles, and Limisso will have a brave spirit of endurance presented to her, if I am any judge of the human countenance.'

'Speak not of it,' said Louis, with emotion: 'it is the sharpest thorn in the many that line a royal crown, to be obliged to execute a needful justice when the heart pleads for the offender; and there was a frank acknowledgment of error, a generosity in the rash act for which he suffers, that would have won the poor youth's pardon from me, had I not trembled for the consequences of relaxed discipline in such a host as that which I now head. It is a needful, though a cruel severity. I had not pardoned Robert for his folly in causing such a misadventure, if he had been less zealous in seeking his young foe's deliverance.'

'Your Grace's pardon for having named the lad,' said the Seneschal, 'since it displeases you. There is more agreeable matter for discussion in the departure of the Tartar envoys.'

'Are they gone, De Joinville?' asked the King, eagerly.

'Ay, my good lord: just before midnight a favourable breeze sprang up, and their vessel sailed, attended by a barque belonging to Sir Walter de Lucy, who proffered his escort for a few miles of sea.'

'Our holy monks went with them?' asked Louis.

'Two or three of the black-faced fathers, so please you, royal Louis, and embroidery enough to convert all Tartary,\* and the

\* Louis sent embroidered pictures of the chief events of the Gospel to Cathay, to convert the Tartars, by two black monks.—See *De Joinville*.

kingdom of Cathay to boot, if "seeing is believing," as the proverb hath it.'

'The saints be praised!' ejaculated the devout sovereign; 'may the kingdom of our Lord be spread over the whole earth soon, and for ever! These Tartars are of a more gentle nature than the dog Saracens, who must be taught at the sword's point, or they will believe nothing.'

'Marry, your Grace,' said the Seneschal, 'they are very difficult of conviction even then. I never heard that all the fighting in Palestine, or the long residence of the Templars and Hospitallers in the East, had effected the conversion of a single infidel.'

'Of no one distinguished by birth, or as a leader amongst them, my good soldier, perhaps; but let us hope that many of the poorer sort have been won to the Church by our valiant and reverend brethren.'

'Methinks,' replied the Seneschal, 'the knights both of the White and Red Cross are more desirous of winning the Paynims' lands than their souls; but I leave such matters to the Church. If all the hard blows they have received will not convince them of the sin of their wicked paynimrie, I know not what can; and it is but just that Christians should win and keep their Master's heritage.'

'The times of judgment and of mercy are in the unerring hand of the Judge of the whole earth,' said Louis, 'and we, His creatures, are to obey the mandates of His Church in reverent humility, leaving the end to Him.—But what brings Sir Geoffrey de Sergines so early hither, and who accompanies him?'

'Sir Edmund Fitzwalter, the moody nephew of the good Baron,—my very disagreeable, but brave and accomplished guest,' replied De Joinville, as the knights approached.



'How now, Sir Geoffrey de Sergines!' exclaimed Louis, as he returned their greeting. 'What tidings do you bring?'

'My liege,' answered the knight, 'the vessel of the Tartar envoys sailed last night, as the Sieur de Joinville has doubtless told your Grace; and about an hour ago one of the priests appointed to accompany them came to me, complaining that he had been seized on his way to the beach—he and a lay brother—by some men-at-arms, forcibly dragged into a house in a byelane (*where*, he cannot tell, as a cloak was tied over his head), and, after being stripped of the dress of his order, and of the embroidered mysteries of his faith, he was kept a prisoner till this morning, when he was removed from the place of his captivity, blindfold, by the same persons, who wore masks, and were quaintly disguised. He came immediately to me, and, accompanied by Sir Edmund Fitzwalter, I have been endeavouring to unravel this mysterious violence.'

'By the Holy Virgin, I will make the traitors rue it, be they who they may!' exclaimed the King, with the irritation of one whose favourite scheme has been thwarted; 'have you found any clue to them, Sir Geoffrey?'

'None, my liege; but the sentinels on the quay, who knew of the projected voyage, declare that a monk of a sable complexion, and the lay brother of a Cyprian monastery, embarked late yester-eve for the vessel of the Tartar chiefs.'

'It was probably the companion of our unfortunate priest,' said Louis. 'I am thankful that one, at least, is with them. It would have been a stain on mine honour to have broken faith with my new ally, and sent him no aid in his dark estate of heathen blindness. Have you other tidings for me, Sir Knight? Your looks threaten some intelligence even more distressing than this untoward and most insolent violence.'

‘I will leave Sir Edmund Fitzwalter to speak the further and more distressing intelligence it is our duty to communicate,’ said De Sergines; ‘he was *my* informer of the matter.’

Louis looked towards the English knight, who replied,

‘I was accosted, as I followed Sir Geoffrey de Sergines, by a stranger, a native of Cyprus, I believe, your Grace, who entreated me to inform the King of France, or some of his immediate attendants, that a murder was committed last night on the person of the Venetian, Signor Ludovico de’ Trevisi, in the cloister of the church of St. John.’

‘Murder!’ exclaimed Louis, with a look and accent of horror; ‘is it possible, and in a church? Father of heaven! why does Thy thunder spare the wretch? I knew the Venetian well—the *Provedditore*—the agent of the Republic in Cyprus; a gentleman of birth, wealth, and importance to our enterprise. Let us return to the palace, Sir Knights, and make instant inquiries into this disgraceful and fatal business.’

They obeyed the King’s command in silence, and as soon as they entered the royal abode a hasty summons was dispatched to the different leaders of the crusaders, and Louis desired Edmund Fitzwalter to bring the Cypriot to the palace, to be in readiness to answer the questions of the council touching the violence and sacrilege of the past night. As the English knight withdrew to execute his mission, a dark ~~skulking~~ smiling smile curled his lip. ‘So changeful and perverse is this same destiny,’ he thought, ‘that he who sat in judgment on myself in Lyons has now to answer for a sacrilegious murder, which can be fully proved against him! I had not thought that Artois, rash as he is, would have fallen so far; but who can foresee his fate? Did I ever dream of becoming *that* which I now am?’

And consoling himself, as the guilty too frequently do, by the

thought that he had a new companion in evil—that another besides himself had fallen—he retraced his steps to the spot where Paul Comnenus awaited him.

‘Shall I have a hearing?’ asked the Greek, impetuously, as he reached him.

‘You will,’ was the reply; ‘the King is even now in the council-chamber; he has summoned the leaders of the army, and requires your attendance.’

‘Does he know the culprit is his brother?’ asked Comnenus, with a bitter smile.

‘He does not, and, for the furtherance of justice, it is better that he should not, till the whole story has been revealed before the assembled chiefs,’ answered Edmund. ‘You must not inform them that I knew who the murderer was, nor yourself name him, till you have told your tale. It is the only sure way of recovering your lost child.’

‘So!’ said the Greek, ironically; ‘I thank you, Sir Knight, for your good counsel. You love not this French Count?’

A flush mounted to the brow of Fitzwalter.

‘I do not,’ he said, briefly: ‘he arrogated to himself the right of inquiring into my actions; it is but just his own should be as carefully scrutinized.’

‘Then,’ replied Paul Comnenus, ‘I may rely on your assistance and your counsel.’

They walked in silence to the palace, at which the heads of the crusading host were rapidly arriving, and waited in an antechamber till summoned into Louis’s presence.

In the meantime the council had nearly all met; they waited only for the Duke of Burgundy; and with surprise and alarm the members present gazed in the interval on the troubled countenance of the King, as he conversed in a low tone with his

brother of Anjou. Charles listened with haughty indifference of manner, and answered in a tone loud enough to be heard by those near him,

‘Your Grace thinks too seriously of such matters. I much doubt if in Egypt or Syria it will be possible for you to preserve the order even now existing in such a multitude. I thought we were summoned to consult on our further movements, not on a matter only requiring the assistance of the provost-marshal.’

‘Nay, Charles,’ replied Louis, mildly, ‘the murdered gentleman is the agent of the Venetian Republic; and what, I pray you, should we do without her assistance? How should we feed our soldiers? It would be ill taken by the Signiory, did we not in person, and with the advice of our councillors, seek for and punish the assassin. And in good time here comes the noble Duke of Burgundy. Welcome, my good lord,’ continued the King, advancing to the chivalrous prince, whose rank was only second to his own; ‘we have troubled you on an affair which *we* esteem of melancholy import, though our brother of Anjou, here, declares you will think it of little moment.’

‘It is rarely that I differ from your Grace,’ replied the Duke, with grave and kindly courtesy; ‘your allies and assistants in ruling our increasing host have full reason to rest on your wise judgment and consideration for their best interests.’

The King bowed with a gratified smile.

‘My lords,’ he said, raising his voice as he addressed the assembly, ‘the trusty knight, Sir Edmund Fitzwalter, has this morning informed us of an act of violence committed on the person of the worthy and illustrious Signor Ludovico de’ Trévisi, the agent of our good friends the Venetians, in Cyprus; and, to add to the atrocity of the deed, the murdered noble was slain in the precincts of the church of St. John after vespers.’

A murmur of horror ran through the assembled leaders.

'Who is the doer of this foul deed, royal Louis?' asked Hugh of Burgundy.

'He who bore the tidings to Sir Edmund refused to name the murderer to any one in private; he waits without to communicate it to the chiefs of our army. From his reluctance to name the offender, Sir Edmund Fitzwalter believes he is of rank, and of our nation. We are now all assembled, methinks, brave lords?'

'We lack the presence only of Count Robert,' answered William of Salisbury.

'So please you, my Lord King,' said De Joinville, 'the prince's favourite knight, Sir Regnier d'Arcy, was here but now, and bore his lord's excuse for not attending. The Count is indisposed.'

'Indeed!' said the King, anxiously; 'not seriously, I trust! Let our leech attend him forthwith. This climate suits not the health of our countrymen, whether of high or low degree. I would that it were possible for us to leave the island before the spring. You will pardon our lack of courtesy, my kind host,' he continued, addressing the King of Cyprus, who stood beside him; 'but, in truth, your climate is the only counterpoise to your princely hospitality.'

'I would it were my subject, your Grace,' replied the graceful De Lusignan, with a courteous smile, 'that I might bid it do your pleasure. Shall we cause the friend of our late esteemed Signor Ludovico to be admitted?'

Louis signified his assent, and in a few seconds a party of Venetians, all who were resident on the island, and one or two young nobles of the same nation, who had come to the Holy War, entered the chamber, to give the support of their countenance to the friend of their slaughtered countryman. A feeling of admiration mingled with the curiosity with which all present

gazed on the unknown Greek, who was clad in a sable mantle, which he folded with a haughty grace round his tall and stately form; his finely-formed head thrown a little back, as he glanced searchingly round the circle, he looked a being of a different nature to the proud chivalry amongst whom he stood. His classic features wore a sternly rigid expression, like the marble which their hue resembled, and his deep-set but glittering eyes rested with a sort of fascination on Louis and Henry de Lusignan, which made the former involuntarily shudder, and the King of Cyprus mutter a prayer against the Evil Eye.

‘You have informed Sir Edmund Fitzwalter—and the presence of these noble gentlemen, our allies of Venice, assure us of the truth of your assertion—that our excellent friend, the accredited agent of the Republic, has been foully murdered. By whom was the deed committed?’ said the King of France, with dignity.

‘King Louis, hear the tale I would fain tell you, and you will know only too soon!’ replied the Greek, in a deep melodious tone, which was distinctly audible to every one present. ‘But first let me tell you, royal sir, that he who now addresses you is one of a royal line which has been the mere sport of Fortune. I am of the house of the Comneni. My heritage has passed from me, and is held by an usurper. Few things were left to me to make life worth the keeping. Now all has been taken at one fell swoop. In my poverty and degradation, I had yet three treasures that kings might envy—a true friend—a fair and duteous child—and, above all, mine honour—my unsullied honour!’ He paused for an instant, then mastering his emotion, continued: ‘Yester-eve, a traitor deprived me of them all; slew my friend in the very temple of his God, and, by bearing off my daughter, defiled for ever the honour of my house.’

'Are these things true, fair sirs?' inquired Louis of the Venetian nobles, his benevolent countenance glowing with indignation. 'Can such things *be* in a Christian land?'

'Ay, royal Louis,' answered the young Lorenzo Peruzzi; 'it is even so. The Signor Ludovico de' Trevisi was found mortally wounded in the cloisters of the cathedral church of St. John, and this gentleman, who was his chosen friend and destined father-in-law, summoned us to his death-bed. He was murdered by the betrayer of his affianced bride, in endeavouring to prevent the traitor from bearing her off!'

A loud exclamation of indignation and horror was uttered by the nobles.

'By the Holy Cross!' exclaimed Louis, 'the foul traitor should die, were he my own son. His name, sirs?'

There was a pause. The Venetian nobles looked silently on each other. 'Of a truth,' said Paul Comnenus, with a bitter smile, 'it touches your Grace in nearly as dear a tie. Ludovico de' Trevisi declared himself slain by Robert, Count d'Artois!'

So great was the amazement his words produced, that a dead silence followed them for some minutes. The King of France looked as if the sudden horror had given him his death-blow, so livid grew his cheek and rigid his frame. The Count of Anjou first broke the spell of silence, and, advancing into the midst of the circle, exclaimed, with an angry flash upon his brow,

'Base Greek, thou liest! My brother is no assassin! If he have slain the Venetian, 't was in fair fight, and not like a vile coward; and if thy dead merchant dared so to accuse him, he lied as thou dost. I will be surety for Count Robert's honour, and in pledge thereof there lies my gage!'

He cast his gauntlet on the ground, and the young Peruzzi advanced, and instantly raised it.

'I accept thy challenge, Sir Count,' he said, proudly, 'and will maintain with my life the truth of my dead kinsman's words.'

'Hold, Charles; hold, worthy signor,' exclaimed Louis, who had not struggled in vain for composure. 'Justice shall have its free course here, and Robert must plead or fight in his own cause. Go you, De Joinville, and tell the prince the imputation cast upon his name. No sickness, were it even to death, would, I am sure, prevent him from personally vindicating his honour.'

The Sieur de Joinville, with a glance of sympathy at his beloved sovereign, left the apartment to do his bidding, and Louis, turning to Henry de Lusignan, continued,

'We know, my royal brother, that in the olden times a father sat in judgment on his sons, and swerved not from the awful justice required of him; but we are not of such an iron nature as was the Roman Brutus, nor would we trust to our own impartiality in a case touching the life and honour of a beloved brother. We will, therefore, pray you to act as judge in this matter, and I and my brothers of Poitiers and Anjou will defer to your judgment, and that of these noble and gallant knights.'

'I take the office, King Louis,' replied the Sovereign of Cyprus, 'in the hope of clearing the noble Count from this strange accusation. If it be false, as I doubt not, he may be able to show that he was elsewhere at the time in question.'

'I would humbly remind your Grace of Cyprus,' said the young Venetian noble, haughtily, 'that Venice holds her children's blood as dear as that of kings, and that the winged lion may not be braved with impunity.'

'You are bold, young signor,' said Henry de Lusignan, with displeasure; 'but we forgive the rash folly of your youth, in consideration of your recent loss. Fear not that justice will be done by this august assembly. Was there any witness of the murder?'



'There was, Sir King,' replied another and an older Venetian; 'a dumb page, whose infirmities prevent his evidence from being available. He had, we learn, walked to church with the lady, and by his gestures summoned aid for his dying master. He probably saw the whole, and assented by signs to his expiring lord's account of the crime.'

'Let him be brought hither,' said Henry, 'with all speed.'

Some attendants left the apartment in obedience to the King's command, and De Lusignan, turning to Louis, endeavoured, with all the graceful courtesies of his character, to soothe and occupy his mind till the arrival of the Count.

The Venetians conversed apart in low tones with each other and with the Greek, who gazed anxiously at the door for the appearance of Artois; whilst Charles of Anjou, leaning sullenly on his sword, regarded them all with looks of angry contempt. A much longer time elapsed than appeared necessary for summoning an inmate of the palace, even though indisposed, and Louis was growing more uneasy than he cared to show, when approaching steps were heard, the door opened, and Robert of Artois entered the room, accompanied by the Sieur de Joinville, two of his own knights, and the pale and terrified jailer of the prison of Limisso. But if the assembled leaders had marvelled at his long delay, their wonder was not diminished by beholding the princely Robert attired in the garb of an English squire! He remarked their surprise with a gay and somewhat mischievous smile, and after slightly bowing to all, advanced to his royal brother.

'I crave your Grace's pardon,' he said, in his usual frank and affectionate manner, 'for the distress this foolish deceit of mine has cost you. I am altogether innocent of the mischance which has befallen the Venetian envoy, having been, as this

worthy jailer can testify, a close prisoner, utterly incapable of working mischief (if I had so desired), by reason of my thralldom in our royal host's strong prison of Limisso.'

'A prisoner in Limisso!' exclaimed Louis; 'we pray you explain what you say, Robert; we cannot read these riddles.'

'Come hither, Sir Jailer,' said the prince, 'and tell these great Kings and leaders how you held a King's son captive.'

'So please your High Mightinesses,' faltered the poor fellow, 'I had charge to keep the English squire, who was to suffer to-day for striking a knight. Yester-noon the royal Count came and showed me a warrant to admit him to the prisoner. Others had had the same privilege, and I hesitated not to allow him and one of his knights to enter. The Count wore his visor down, both when he entered and when he came forth. I did not know that it was not the prince himself who left the prison, till the same knight who had accompanied him came half an hour ago, with the Lord Seneschal of Champagne, and bade me open the doors and release the Count d'Artois.'

'Then it would appear,' said Henry of Cyprus, 'that the Count d'Artois exchanged dresses with the prisoner, and set him free? Was it not so, my good lord?'

'Ay, your Grace,' said Artois. 'Methought the punishment of the young scapegrace was too severe; and, moreover, his lady-love, the pretty peasant girl (who, by'r Lady, proves to be a princess in disguise), besought me so movingly for him, that I could not say her nay. So I freed him, on condition that, as soon as he wears gold spurs, he shall give me satisfaction for the villanous blow he bestowed on me.'

'My daughter sue to thee for a stranger!' cried Paul Commenus, pale with anger; 'prince though thou art, base Frank, thou beliest her! How could she—gentle, timid, a stranger in

Limisso—how could she find her way to thee, without my knowledge? Why hazard so much to save one whom she had scarce seen? It is all a falsehood, a base subterfuge!

'Now, by the saints!' exclaimed D'Artois, angrily, laying his hand on his dagger; then as suddenly checking himself, he added, 'But I will not chastise thee here, caitiff, as thou deservest! Sir Regnier d'Arcy, thou hast a cooler head, and knowest more of the tale throughout than I do; be pleased to tell the King of Cyprus, and these my noble peers, the rights on't.'

The Provençal knight obeyed; and the great leaders of Christendom were hushed in silence, as they listened to the romance of young love and successful daring which he told. Even the grave Venetians unbent their heavy brows as they heard; and when D'Arcy paused, Louis of France spoke with much emotion.

'Thank Heaven thou art innocent of even the appearance of guilt, my Robert,' he said; 'but we must, nevertheless, chide thee for intermeddling with our justice, and enjoin thee to pay as heavy a fine as our allies shall deem meet into the public treasury. We are also rejoiced to find that the Signor Ludovico was not unfairly dealt with, albeit, could we retake this same unlucky youth, we should judge it right to punish him more heavily for profaning a holy cloister, and withdrawing the maiden from the power of her father. But since he escaped long before dawn, it is too late to hope for his recapture. What think you, my good lords, of this strange wild tale?'

'The prince has been more generous than prudent, Sire,' answered the Duke of Burgundy, 'and we agree with your Grace on inflicting a fine on him for the obstruction he has

put in the way of justice by releasing this young firebrand. You have heard, signors : what more do you desire in this matter ?’

‘A swift galley to pursue the villain who slew our countryman,’ replied Lorenzo Peruzzi, sternly. ‘We will have vengeance on him who, ye say, in the garb of the Count d’Artois, took Ludovico De’ Trevisi’s life.’

‘You shall command any one of our fleet for the execution of your purpose,’ said the Duke : ‘we have no wish to favour so evil an example by suffering him to escape with impunity. The Syrians’ was a heavy vessel, and I should think might easily be overtaken by one of your own swift galleys ; but, as I have said, you may choose from our fleet. Say I not well, gentlemen ?’

A murmur of assent was given, and the young Venetian bowed an acknowledgment. He then turned to the Greek, who had listened in agonized silence to the relation of the deceit practised on him by his child.

‘Come, good Messer Paul,’ he said, kindly, ‘away with us ; we may yet regain this untoward damsel of thine. What, man ! thou shalt command the vessel !’

‘I pray you leave me, good signor,’ replied Comnenus, with a frightful composure of manner, contrasted with his glaring eye. ‘I will not stir a step to recover the shameless stain on my house ! Her mother was a peasant, and the vile blood of the churl has for ever dishonoured the last scion of a kingly line. I curse her ! On the sea or the dry land ; wedded or solitary——’

‘Peace, man, if thou art a Christian !’ interposed Louis, earnestly. ‘The damsel hath done ill to leave thee, and merits thine anger, but such heathen-like curses befit not one who hopes for salvation only as he forgives others. It would better

become thee as a parent to follow this castaway, and bring her back, that she might atone for her fault by a life of penance and devotion, rather than to curse her thus !'

A glance full of hatred was the only reply the wretched Comnenus vouchsafed to this rebuke, but he dropped the uplifted arm with which he was wildly gesticulating, and in sullen silence, gathering his mantle round him, walked from the chamber, followed by the Venetians.

'I congratulate you on the escape of your kinsman, De Lucy,' said William Longsword, as he and Sir Walter rode side by side into Limisso.

'A sad scapegrace, a sad scapegrace, on mine honour,' replied the English Baron, shaking his head; 'who would have thought of his running away with the dark Greek's pretty daughter? By my faith, 't was enough to anger the man.'

'I hope that the Venetians may not succeed in overtaking him, or the prince's generous deliverance will prove of no avail to him,' rejoined William Longspée.

'No fear on't, noble Earl,' said the elder De Lucy, with a low laugh; 'they will sail after the wrong vessel: a barque of mine own escorted the Syrian ship out of harbour, and, when clear of land, received my precious nephew and (I doubt not) his runaway damsel, who are now on their voyage to England.'

'It is well you were so provident, good friend, for a Venetian follows the scent of revenge like a sleuth-hound. Look you, what a crowd is gathered here to witness the boy's intended punishment.'

They had gained the principal square of the city, where a mob of the lower order of Cypriots had collected round the raised scaffold on which Wilfred de Lucy had been destined to expiate his breach of military discipline.

'I thank Heaven,' exclaimed Sir Walter energetically, 'that the cowardly caitiffs are not to be gratified by seeing the red blood of a De Lucy spout beneath yonder axe! But here comes a herald at full speed to tell them of their disappointment—the knaves!'

A herald, a few seconds afterwards, mounted the scaffold, and informed the people that the culprit had, for a time, escaped the rigour of the law, but that he doubtless would shortly be retaken, and expiate his crime as they had anticipated. His intelligence was received with a suppressed murmur, and the populace, disappointed of their savage pleasure, slowly dispersed.

Edmund Fitzwalter had left the palace as the Venetians departed, and followed the stately figure of the Greek, as he strode through the crowded streets. When Paul Comnenus at last turned, their eyes met, and the Greek paused till Fitzwalter stood beside him.

'You are doubtless rejoiced, Sir Englishman,' said he, ironically, 'that I have had such ample justice, and that your friend, the Count d'Artois, is acquitted?'

'Twas well and craftily done,' replied Edmund, calmly. 'The Venetians are satisfied, and Count Robert is made to appear not culpable in the matter of their countryman's death; but methinks, Sir Greek, you have still little cause to love him. Had he connived at my daughter's flight—if I had one—and assisted in the escape of my friend's murderer, I would have avenged the injury, or lost my life in the attempt.'

'It is well for you to talk, Sir Knight; and of a truth I owe this flippant Frenchman a deep debt of hatred, which I will surely pay! But know that these limbs never bore the weight of armour; this hand never couched a lance. I was bred for the Church. Would to Heaven I had never forsaken it, and

then this woe had not fallen on me! The Venetian would have been my champion, so long as he deemed Artois the murderer of his kinsman; as it is, he will avenge his wrongs and mine own on the head of the villain who has stolen my child.'

'I did not know that a native of Venice was so scrupulous in seeking satisfaction for an injury. I thought there was always amongst your countrymen a sure method of revenge for the warrior or man of peace,' said Edmund, with a slight sneer.

'I am no Venetian, but a Greek,' exclaimed Paul, angrily; 'would you insinuate that I ought to play the part of an assassin?'

'I would insinuate nothing,' replied his companion; 'could I not resent my injuries with the sword, I should feel no repugnance to use such means as fate bestowed on me, nor deem myself guilty of a crime in so doing. I pitied you, and would have consoled you by suggesting the only satisfaction left you—revenge. Good day, Messer Paul Comnenus.'

'Stay!' cried the Greek, impetuously; but Fitzwalter had said all he could with safety, and walked hastily away from his new acquaintance, hoping that the art with which he had awakened the suspicions of the man's nature would not be lost, but bear fruit to the injury of him whom he bitterly hated.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

## THE WRECK.

But now there came a flash of hope once more ;  
 Day broke, and the wind lulled ; the masts were gone,  
 The leak increased ; shoals round her, but no shore ;  
 The vessel swam, yet still she held her own.

BYRON.

OUR tale must now pass onwards for four months, and change the scene likewise from the gay and beautiful island of Cyprus to the boundless and dreary waters of the vast Atlantic, over which howled the wind of a tempestuous January. No ray of sunshine pierced through the heavy canopy of clouds, and there was an uneasy swell in the sea, as if its waves had been too recently lashed into fury by their stern taskmasters the winds for them to forget it, and lie calmly in their appointed bounds. Over their sullen expanse floated a solitary object, a dismasted wreck ; and on its deck two persons might be distinguished, the sole survivors of its drowned or famished crew ; one, clad in a priest's garb, had sunk from exhaustion on the deck, the other knelt beside his companion, and tenderly supported the drooping head on his arm. It was Wilfred de Lucy, bending in an agony of sorrow and remorse above his loved Eudocia.

Pale, wan, attenuated, no one who had known the English squire in Cyprus would have recognized him now. The maiden was less changed, for, as far as he could and by every possible self-privation, Wilfred had softened for her the horrors of their position. They had at first been favoured in their flight by fair and fresh breezes, but no sooner had they passed the Straits



that lead from the loveliest of seas into the wildest of oceans, than storms gathered round them, and all the terrors of the great deep beset their ill-fated barque. Floating, at last, a hopeless wreck upon the waters, their provisions spoiled or consumed, famine added a ghastlier horror to their sufferings, till all had perished save the boy lover and his betrothed bride. And now, as Wilfred gazed on her closed eyelids and listened to her faint breathing, he almost hoped that she would never open her eyes again—that her sufferings might have reached their close; but she shuddered, and he drew the mantle that enfolded her slight form closer.

‘Are you cold, my Eudocia?’ he asked; ‘will you go within the castle?’ (the cabin of the ship, occupying the place of our poop.)

‘No, Wilfred,’ she answered, mournfully; ‘it is as chill there, for the waves and winds have not spared it more than the other portions of this hapless barque. The cold that benumbs my senses is that of death. Weep not for me, my beloved, but pray that I may be forgiven. I have greatly sinned, and meet but my just punishment. What saith the holy commandment of God?—“Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be *long* in the land!” Alas, alas! I honoured not my only parent; I left his age desolate for love of a stranger; and I die justly in my youth, on this wild and awful solitude of the sea.’

‘Do you repent, then, having loved me, Eudocia?’ he asked, reproachfully.

‘No, no, dearest Wilfred!’ she replied, clasping his hand eagerly in her long thin fingers. ‘It is of Heaven’s mercy that I am permitted to die on your bosom; it is more than I deserve, and a far happier lot than to live without you! But I have sinned in my duty as a child, and I repent in this my last hour

of life, bitterly and sincerely. Pray that I may be forgiven, Wilfred.'

'Reproach not yourself so bitterly, love,' said De Lucy; 'bethink you, your father would have forced you into a marriage with a man whom you abhorred. Your flight alone saved you from the heavy guilt of perjury.'

'I am not sure of that, Wilfred. I think now I ought to have waited patiently, and tried what time and gentle submission might have wrought for me. There is a deep fountain of love in a father's heart, and though it appeared dried up, my duty, my obedience, and my tears, might perchance have awaked its slumbering waters. Oh, my father! could I but gaze once more on thy brow, albeit stern and cold, and hear thy lips pronounce thy pardon, I should die happy.'

She paused, and De Lucy did not speak for some moments; but as he bent over her she felt his warm tears fall like the heavy drops of a thunder-shower on her brow.

'Forgive me, Eudocia,' he said, in faltering accents, after a lengthened pause, 'forgive the selfish love which has brought you to this misery. I had hoped to bear you to a blithe English home; to see you loved and cherished by my mother and my brave brothers; to make your after life a dream of happiness——'

The youth paused and his deep sobs shook his weakened frame.

'Nay, my beloved,' said the young Greek, pressing his hand, 'nay, I have nought to forgive. Your love has made me happy living, and cheers for me the dim path of death. I only was to blame. Alas! wherefore should my sin be visited on you, dear Wilfred?'

'Talk not of death, Eudocia! There is still hope for us. A succour may come yet, at our greatest need!'

The maiden shook her head feebly, and sank into her former position. There was again a deep silence, broken at length by Eudocia.

'I am sore athirst, Wilfred,' she said, faintly; 'give me to drink, I implore you!'

De Lucy had caught the welcome drops of a heavy shower that morning in a large drinking-vessel, and now he held the rain-water to Eudocia's fevered lips, breathing an inward thanksgiving that the intolerable pangs of thirst were not added to the cravings of that hunger which he knew she felt, although she named it not.

'Eudocia,' he said, as she finished drinking, 'I will mount to the top of the castle—there is yet enough of it to bear my weight—and gaze around the horizon once more, to see if the saints yet vouchsafe to send us succour.'

'Go, dear Wilfred, but be careful of your own safety. Remember, if you perish, I perish with you.'

He leaned over her, kissed her forehead, and then sprang with an enfeebled yet agile step up the remainder of the ladder. The Greek girl listened with a beating heart to his footsteps, but she was too weak to turn and watch his movements. He had been gone some minutes, which seemed hours to her, and she sighed as she thought of the vast and cheerless expanse upon which he was gazing, when suddenly he uttered a shout of wild, exulting rapture, that startled her from her apathy of despair.

'There is hope, there is aid, there is life yet for us, Eudocia!' he cried; 'a tall ship comes over the waters! Blessed be Thy name, O Father of mercy!'

The maiden fervently responded to the ejaculation of thanksgiving.

'Do they see our signal?' she asked, in a tone hoarse with agitation.

'They do—they approach! 'Tis an English ship, a gallant vessel; St. George's flag is fluttering boldly in the breeze! They are laying-to—they have lowered a boat; a knight springs into it—they come!' And lifting his voice as high as his strength allowed, his shout of 'Hurrah! for merry England!' floated feebly over the waves. It was cheerily answered by the stout boatmen, who bent lustily and with greater energy to their oars as they recognized the accents of a fellow-countryman, and shortly after Wilfred de Lucy had descended to the side of his fair companion, a knight sprang on the deck, and hailed him.

'A wreck, I perceive,' he said, in answer to De Lucy's incoherent thanks for his providential aid; 'how many in number are the crew?'

'Two persons only survive,' said the squire; 'myself and a most unhappy but honourable lady. All besides have perished.'

The knight shuddered.

'The saints be praised that we have come in time to save her,' he said; 'lead me to her quickly, young sir, for the wind is still boisterous, and we shall have difficulty in regaining our ship.'

De Lucy led him to Eudocia, who could not speak her thanks.

'Come, gentle madam,' said the stranger, courteously, 'let me lift you into the boat, you will soon be safe.' But Eudocia clung silently to Wilfred, who tried, though vainly, to raise her, and desisted, with a faint glow of shame at his want of strength, which the knight remarked.

'Your friend is too weak from exhaustion, lady,' he said, 'to lift you. Get first into the boat, young sir, and I will bring the lady after you.'

Wilfred obeyed silently, and their preserver, gently raising the light form of the Greek, followed him hastily, for there was peril in each moment of delay. He placed Eudocia by De Lucy's side, and seating himself next her, the boat again bounding over the waves, soon gained the side of the English ship, and Sir Gerald Pauncefort (for their deliverer was the Knight of Leighton) lifted on board his vessel the girl whose fault was destined to influence fatally the destiny of the crusaders.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### A BRIDAL.

Submit yourself to God, and you shall find  
God fights the battles of a will resigned.

BISHOP KEN.

HAPPILY, the Hospitaller, Sir Almeric, from the experience of his Order, was versed in leechcraft; and to his care Eudocia was at once committed. She hovered long between life and death; but the skill of the knightly priest, and the strong vitality of youth, in the end prevailed, and she gradually recovered, though still weak and emaciated, and bearing on her soft young brow the seal of a great sorrow. It was a happy day for Wilfred when he could assist her to come on deck to breathe the fresh sweet sea-air, which he trusted would perfect her cure. The wife of one of the camp-followers, who sailed in the English ship, had nursed and waited on the young lady, and lent her garments of her own in place of those which had been drenched by the waves. It was, therefore, in the costume of an

English peasant that the beautiful Greek now appeared. Wilfred placed her on a pile of flags on the deck, and, after many tender cares for her comfort, left her, at her earnest request. Long and sadly Eudocia then looked over the sea, which had so nearly entombed her, the tears gently rolling down her pale cheeks. Pauncefort, believing that she had been orphaned in the wreck, stood apart, in reverence for her grief, till she became more composed; then advancing, he congratulated her courteously on her recovery, and expressed his pleasure at seeing her able to come on deck.

‘It is but rude tendance you can have had here, lady,’ he said, ‘but kindly wishes must be accepted instead of deeds.’

Eudocia answered him by a passionate and tearful burst of gratitude.

‘When your foot, Sir Knight, touched the deck of our wrecked vessel,’ she exclaimed, ‘you brought me not only life but salvation. Ay! my soul’s salvation! for you gave me time for atonement—time to prove that I am penitent for a great sin!’

Much astonished, and believing that her late sufferings and terrors had troubled her reason, Gerald sought to soothe and calm her, and to turn her thoughts from the frightful recollections of danger and anguish which appeared to haunt her still so terribly.

‘The danger is past, lady,’ he said. ‘Let us praise God for deliverance, and endeavour to forget the storm. All is now bright and calm—almost too calm, for there is scarcely wind enough to bear us over this sunny Southern sea.’

‘Are we once more in the Mediterranean?’ she asked sadly, glancing at the rippling, sunny waves.

‘Yes, lady; we passed the Straits yester-even.’

She sighed deeply.

'Then you are on your way back to——?' she faltered.

'To Cyprus, madam, to join the army of the crusaders.'

'And Wilfred?' she cried, in alarm. 'Does he know——?'

'He does, lady, and has begged us to set him and your fair self on shore at Marseilles, which we shall reach shortly.'

'Ah! *he* must not return to Cyprus; he must land in France—but not I!—not I! Sir Knight, you see in me a disobedient child, who, flying from the just authority of her parent, has, like the wicked prophet of whom the priests tell us, encountered God's anger on the deep. But doubtless Wilfred has told you our sad story?'

'He has told me how and why he escaped from Cyprus. He has spoken of you, lady, only as his betrothed wife. Further I know not. I feared that you had lost your natural protectors in the wreck, and had thus fallen to his sole care.'

'Ah! no. I had no protector but Wilfred. Let me tell you my tale, Sir Knight, and you will see at once that I must return to Cyprus, and submit myself to the just anger of an offended father.' And with bitter tears Eudocia related the story of her disobedience and flight. The knight listened with kindly sympathy.

'You have erred, maiden,' he said, gently, when she paused; 'erred greatly. It is always better to suffer than to sin; and though you were right in refusing to perjure yourself by uttering false marriage vows, you should, nathless, have joined with that refusal a meek submission in all other respects to your father's will. You should never voluntarily have left him.'

'My own heart has already told me so, brave Englishman,' she answered. 'I repent me sorely of my fault. I will return, and, kneeling at my father's feet, implore his pardon, and submit to any chastisement it may please him to inflict, even if it be that of death.'

‘Such would, indeed, seem to be the path of your duty,’ replied the knight, ‘and you may rely upon my best aid in achieving your devoir. I will myself take you to your father. Surely, when he knows that it is the nephew of the gallant Walter de Lucy who would fain make you his bride, he will not withhold his assent?’

Eudocia shook her head. ‘Nay, there is no hope of obtaining it! My father is firm in his prejudices, and he hates your nation. Wilfred and I must part for ever!’

She could not finish her speech, but sobbed in an agony of grief and despair.

Pauncefort was much moved. He took her hand and endeavoured tenderly to soothe her agitation.

‘You are not yet equal to determine on your future plans,’ he said; ‘wait till you are stronger, and then we will seek ghostly counsel from your kind leech, the Hospitaller, Sir Almeric de Brienne. Meantime, let not your heart be troubled in the matter. We have great rest in leaving matters of conscience such as these to our spiritual guides. Await the priest’s decision in peace, lady.’

Wilfred de Lucy at this moment joined them, and the knight, after exchanging a few words with him on the circumstances of their present voyage, left the young pair together. Eudocia said nothing to her lover of the intention which she knew would sadden his whole life, but listened with restrained agony as he whispered bright auguries of the future, and told her of that blithe English homestead, round which his affections fondly clung, and in which he prophesied that his beloved would begin a new and joyous life, such as yet she had never known. To her ear a death-chant and the toll of a knell rang under the joyous chime of that romance of youth and love.



The Knight of St. John heard the tale of the maiden's filial disobedience with more of pity than Gerald had anticipated.

'The damsel has done grievous wrong,' he said, 'and has incurred peril of good name and honour by her disobedience. But I chance to know her father, Paul Comnenus, and if fault of child may be excused by the evil nature of a parent, hers may be. I tell thee, Gerald, the Greek is one of the worst of a false and treacherous nation. Who is there, bearing the Cross, who does not know the Comneni as favourers rather of the infidels than the Christians? I should not have marvelled had he sold his daughter to a Saracen prince instead of betrothing her to a Venetian. He is capable of it, had it suited his purpose.'

'Were it well, then, to restore the maiden to such ungentle keeping?' asked Gerald.

The Hospitaller took two or three turns on the deck, which they were pacing side by side, before he answered. At last he said,

'Truly, I think not. It would be the wiser plan, methinks, to wed the pair at Marseilles, and send her to the Dame de Lucy's care at once. I can, on her confession, impose a heavy penance of another nature than a return to the tender mercies of Paul Comnénus, the sworn foe of our order, and the most vindictive and cruel of his race. And for De Lucy, I shall bind him in return to take the Cross in Palestine whenever I may call on him to do so, and to pay to the Orders of the Temple and St. John a heavy mulct of gold—both for the scandal brought on the crusaders' camp, and for leading the maiden to disobey her father. The De Lucys are wealthy and liberal. Wilfred's mother will gratefully acknowledge a benefit done to her young son.'

'You know the dame?'

'Right well, my son. I am of Northern descent on the mother's side, and have kindred both sides of the border.'

‘But how if the lady disapprove of Master Wilfred’s early wooing and wedding?’

‘Nay, she will not. His elder brother is childless, and she would fain have kept Wilfred at home, he tells me, could she have done so with honour. The maiden is of royal descent. There can be no question of the fitness of the alliance.’

The knight gladly bore the decision of the Hospitaller to his fair passenger; but to his surprise it did not receive the grateful acquiescence he had anticipated. Eudocia’s repentance, roused by the horrors she had passed through, was sincere. She desired to suffer from the extreme vengeance of her father rather than to persist in a course of filial disobedience, and it was not till the Hospitaller had represented to her that the sole satisfaction remaining for her father would be the knowledge that her honour was assured by her marriage with the nephew of Sir Walter de Lucy, that she gave a reluctant assent to Wilfred’s agonized entreaties and the priest’s exhortations, vowing at the same time, however, that her life should be a perpetual regret and penance till her parent’s pardon should reach her in her far-off English home.

While the crusaders’ ship sped gallantly onwards towards the French port, the knights often questioned Wilfred of the events that had occurred since the crusaders reached Cyprus. De Lucy related all that had happened from the period of their embarkation, giving his hearers at the same time a tolerably good idea of the characters of their fellow-crusaders. In doing so, he dwelt frequently on the generosity, mingled with rashness and haughtiness, of his recent foe, Prince Robert of France.

‘He is a right gallant gentleman,’ he observed one day, as he and Pauncefort sat alone on deck, ‘but his rash and hasty temper is ever giving or taking offence. He hates our leader,

the bold Earl William, and scorns our nation—albeit he hath chosen an English damsel for his lady-love.'

'Ay! and who may the damsel be?' asked Gerald, indifferently.

'The Lady Cicely Fitzwalter.'

The knight started and changed colour.

'And how doth the prince's suit speed?' he asked, abruptly, after a pause.

'Well with the Baron Fitzwalter, and not ill with the lady, though her smiles are uncertain and hard to win, men say. I speak but from common rumour,' he added, as he remarked the sudden paleness that overspread Gerald's countenance; 'a poor esquire hath no certain means of judging of the love-suit of a prince.'

'And common rumour is falsehood itself,' said the knight; 'yet—it were best that she loved him!'

He was silent, and Wilfred, though surprised at his agitation, did not interrupt his apparently painful reverie.

'But wherefore doth Prince Robert bear enmity against our gallant Salisbury?' Pauncefort at length asked.

'I know not, Sir Knight, save that report says the prince envies him his fame, and fears him as a rival in his love.'

'I should have thought him too generous to be capable of so evil a passion as envy,' said the knight; 'report must surely wrong him.'

'Perhaps it may,' answered Wilfred; 'he hath a talent for creating enemies for himself! But I, at least, will bear honourable testimony to the nobleness of his nature. I long to win my spurs, that I may return and offer him full reparation for the blow I gave him.'

'I trust you may find an opening for obtaining your desire

shortly,' said Gerald; 'the prince will doubtless then secure you a safe-conduct into the crusaders' camp, and a fair field with himself.'

'And will you, courteous knight, see the Count d'Artois, as soon as it may be after your landing, and assure him of my gratitude and good faith?'

'Ay, marry will I; and of the safety of your fair Eudocia. Guard the poor maiden from all ill as far as lieth in your power, De Lucy, for she hath sacrificed much for you—peace of conscience and the unsullied lustre of that reputation which in a Christian maiden should be without the stain of a doubt or a suspicion. I have promised that I will see her father and do my best to win his pardon for her; but never, while she lives, will she again possess the priceless treasure of a conscience free from self-reproach.'

'It is too true,' said Wilfred, mournfully, 'that I have darkened her life, but I will do all that love can do to console her and make her happy.'

Marseilles was reached at length, and there, in presence of her preserver and the Hospitaller, Eudocia Comnena became the wife of the young English squire; and parting with thanks and tears from her deliverer and the good Knight of St. John, set out on her journey to her husband's native land. Wilfred was happy, though anticipating, with feelings of some anxiety, the reception a returned crusader would be likely to meet in England; for as Eudocia had sacrificed her peace of mind for him, he also had incurred for her sake the risk of that blame and contempt which the spirit of the age inspired towards one who, having taken the Cross, came back without striking a blow for the Holy Sepulchre.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## VENETIAN REVENGE.

Oh that the slave had forty thousand lives !  
 One is too poor, too weak for my revenge.

SHAKSPEARE.

**I**N his lonely study, Paul Comnenus sat in deep and painful abstraction. The time which had elapsed since his daughter's flight had wrought the work of years. His stately form was bent as with age, his lofty brow contracted, his cheek sunken, and his eyes gleamed with a fearful brilliancy that gave the only appearance of life to his fixed and motionless features. With Eudocia he had lost everything. His ambitious hopes of regaining his proper position in society had been blasted by the death of Ludovico de' Trevisi, and with the disappointment of his selfish views was mingled the bitterness of deceived affection ; for though in his vindictive mood he had cursed his only child—and had never, even in thought, unsaid that cruel malediction—he had really loved her. By severe application to study he strove vainly to forget her ; but it was impossible to banish the recollection of the object of so many years' anxious thought, and it was of her he was vaguely dreaming—even when endeavouring to reflect on the contents of the volume that he still grasped, although his eyes rested not on it—when a rap at the door of his chamber roused him.

'A stranger would speak with you, master,' said the old nurse, as, in obedience to his command, she opened the door, and admitted her head only within the sanctuary of which she had a superstitious awe ; 'a stranger—he bade me say, from Venice.'

'Admit him, Irene,' said Paul Comnenus, rising, 'he is an expected guest.'

The old woman withdrew, and in a few minutes ushered a middle-sized, dark-browed man, muffled up in a heavy horseman's cloak, into the apartment. Throwing back his hood, the stranger advanced with extended hand to the Greek.

'I am come at last, Signor Paul,' he said, 'to claim your hospitality and friendship, in right of the love you bore Ludovico de' Trevisi.'

'And you are welcome, Signor Carlo,' said his host, grasping his hand warmly, 'right welcome to my poor home. I had hoped to see you long ere this—but you are still welcome.'

'I could not leave Venice earlier,' said the stranger, who was a brother of the dead Ludovico; 'matters of much moment required my presence there, but the Signor Peruzzi assured me that you would secure our revenge on this misproud Frenchman. Do you still believe that the laying the crime on the young Englishman was a mere evasion?'

'I do. Peruzzi pursued the Syrian vessel that bore the supposed Tartar envoys to Beyrout, overtook it, and found that the youth was not on board, nor had any damsel been seen in her. They asserted at Limisso, that the squire, disguised as a black monk, passed from her to an English vessel, soon after quitting the harbour, and that my wretched child was with him, wearing the garb of a lay brother; but I believe this story to be but a cunningly-devised fable to screen the real culprit from his brother's wrath; for Louis is, at least, just, and would have forced Artois to restore my lost one, as well as have punished him heavily for your brother's murder. Liberating the squire, and fixing Artois' guilt upon him, was a piece of plotting worthy of the subtle Charles of Anjou, who probably devised it.'

A dark expression of hatred rested on the Venetian's brow.

'It shall not suffice to save him from *my* vengeance,' he said, in a harsh, constrained tone: 'we citizens of Venice have a sure mode of obtaining justice, which will not fail me here. I should have thought so certain a course of procuring revenge would have suggested itself to the mind of the sage Comnenus.'

'You are right, noble Carlo, and, but that I lacked the means of paying those who would do the deed for me, Artois had been food for worms long since. I have sought to be the executor of our revenge, myself, in vain. He bears, methinks, a charmed life. I have tried poison—and he drank not of the cup that held it; my dagger has been pointed at his breast, in darkness, and some happy chance hath saved him; and yet,' he continued, grasping the arm of his companion, 'I have read his fate in the unerring stars, and they threaten him with violent, sudden, and bloody death!'

'I will prove them true prophets, by San Marco,' said Carlo de' Trevisi; 'I have three as bold fellows with me as ever stepped on the Rialto. They shall do the deed for us, since it is but dirty work for noble gentlemen. Where can he be found most unguarded, or alone?'

'He woos an English damsel, the daughter of the Baron Fitzwalter, and from her cousin (who loves not D'Artois) I have learned that he nightly sings beneath her window fantastic Provençal lays, hoping to win her by such follies. He is then alone, and frequently armed only with his dagger.'

'Where dwells the maiden?' asked De' Trevisi.

'She is an attendant of Marguerite of France, and dwells in the palace with the other ladies of the Queen's Court.'

'Beneath a palace window is scarcely a meet spot for such a deed,' said Carlo, with a sarcastic smile.

‘Nay, hear me to the end! This palace of Limisso has been built by the usurper, De Lusignan, in a thick grove of orange and citron trees—the ancient dwelling of our line contented not his luxury!—and through it the French Count must pass to regain the principal entrance. Your bravoës may waylay him there.’

‘T will do! ’T is a good plot!’ said the Venetian. ‘I will take measures for securing our vengeance. And now, may I tax your hospitality for a draught of your Cyprus wine? for I have ridden hard hither, and came supperless from Limisso.’

‘Irene shall task her skill to set before you such a repast as my poverty can afford, albeit I doubt if it will tempt the appetite of a Venetian senator.’

‘A morsel of bread and a cup of wine will suffice, my kind host,’ was the reply.

And the Signor de’ Trevisi, with a manner as calm as if he had been planning a day’s sport, instead of a secret murder, followed Paul Comnenus to the eating-room, and did ample justice to the frugal meal prepared for him.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A RESCUE.

The climate’s delicate; the air most sweet;  
Fertile the isle.

SHAKSPEARE.

**T**HE time fixed for the departure of the army of the Cross from Cyprus was fast approaching. The harbour was



filled with ships of every Christian nation that possessed any maritime power ; and the English galley which bore Pauncefort and his companions passed through a perfect forest of masts to the spot where St. George's Cross floating above the galley of Plantagenet marked the anchorage of the vessels which followed William of Salisbury's banner.

Sir Gerald, standing on deck with the Hospitaller and other knights who now accompanied him, gazed with eager and delighted eyes on the busy and animated scene. The harbour and beautiful island were full of interest to an Englishman, because associated with the memory of the heroic Cœur de Lion. As Gerald gazed on the silvery waves in the offing, he could almost fancy he beheld them tossing in angry mood the vessel of Richard's Berengaria ; and his imagination pictured the angry king leaping, armed as he was, into the boat, prepared to take deep vengeance on the discourteous and cowardly despot for the insult offered to his betrothed. A summons from his comrades to land roused him from the daydreams of the past in which he loved to indulge, and, with a smile at his own abstraction, he followed them, not without a feeling of regret that Cœur de Lion was no longer living to lead his brave lieges to glory, and that the Lion banner was not destined to wave, in conjunction with the Oriflamme of France, on the plains of Egypt and Palestine.

Separating from his companions—who joined some brethren of their respective Orders of the Temple and St. John as soon as they landed—Pauncefort walked slowly through the crowded streets of Limisso, looking with curiosity and interest on the busy groups everywhere assembled, discoursing in nearly as many different languages as the builders of Babel may be supposed to have done ; various in garb as in nation. Here rude,

half-ruffian Bretons laughed at or with the light Gascon soldiers ; there a Burgundian knight, the very pink of courtesy, managed his mettled steed, and bowed a courteous greeting to a stately white-robed Templar who walked beside a gay courtier of Henry de Lusignan's. Venetian merchants and travellers, Jews, Moors, Frenchmen, Englishmen, and Flemings ; priests of the church militant, pedlars, beggars, and the dark-browed and lively natives of the island thronged the streets ; but as yet not one familiar face had met the eye of the young Knight of Leighton. Somewhat wearied of his walk, he at length approached a group of knights who stood in earnest discourse near a large building, and demanded of them 'where the Earl of Salisbury or the English baron, the Lord Fitzwalter, had his quarters?' The tallest of the party turned quickly as he spoke, and started as he confronted the knight.

'Gerald Pauncefort !' he exclaimed.

'Even so,' said the young Englishman, smiling ; 'and if my memory serve me truly, I speak to Edmund Fitzwalter.'

He extended his hand, and as if his cordial words and manner had relieved him of some terrible apprehension, Fitzwalter breathed deeply, and grasping the extended pledge of kindly feeling, warmly greeted his former comrade's brother.

'It is so long since we met, Edmund,' said Gerald, in reply to his eager welcome, 'that I should not have recognized you, had you not so greatly resembled your fair cousin.'

'In truth, it is a long time since we played together,' answered Edmund ; 'but you are little changed except in stature and years since then. I recognized you at a glance. I hope all at Leighton are now well.'

'My mother and Constance were well when I left them in November. My father's death preceded your departure, I believe?'

'Nay, I hear it now for the first time. I left England before the rest of the crusaders as escort to my cousin Cicely; and the Baron must be also ignorant of the sad event, or I should have learned it from him. I grieve to hear it, for the gallant old knight was ever my kind host and friend.'

'It is probable that in her grief and anxiety on my account—for I was confined to a sick-bed after his interment—my mother neglected to have the sad tidings conveyed to the Baron. My father died the second or third day after my return to Leighton.'

'Of what disease?' asked Edmund, with much apparent interest.

'Of fever,' answered Gerald, sadly, 'caused, I fear, by the regret for our murdered Edward, which preyed incessantly on his mind.'

His companion turned pale, and was silent for a few minutes.

Gerald remarked his sudden change of colour, and again extended his hand, saying,

'Suffer me to thank you, brave Fitzwalter, for the love you bore my brother—for the aid you brought him, though, alas! too late—and for the remembrance you still so faithfully cherish of your early friend.'

'Spare me these thanks, I pray you, Gerald,' answered Fitzwalter, just touching the extended hand, and then half turning away from his companion: 'there is no cause for them. You are in search of my uncle's dwelling,' he continued, hurriedly; 'let me guide you thither, for he will be rejoiced to find he has another brave lance added to his gallant band of chivalry. He much regretted your enforced absence when we left England.'

'I was to have had the honour of escorting his fair daughter through France,' said Gerald, with a sigh. 'I trust the Lady Cicely is well?'

They moved onwards, as Sir Edmund answered,  
‘Ay, and more beautiful than ever. Besides my own dutiful attendance, she had the escort of a prince from Paris to Lyons. Robert, Count d’Artois, was, and is now, her vowed servant and knight, and if she list, Cicely may be sister-in-law to a King.’

‘Indeed!’ replied Pauncefort, sadly; ‘and doth she reject his proffered love?’

‘Not decidedly, but she is proud and coy as ever. You wot well, Sir Knight, she has driven our English chivalry to despair by her obduracy. But here is the mansion which it has pleased Henry of Cyprus to assign for the residence of our English leaders. Will you enter?’

The Baron Fitzwalter gave his young adherent a cordial and warm greeting, and expressed much sincere sorrow as he listened to Gerald’s account of the Knight of Leighton’s death.

‘I was too certain,’ he said, ‘that mine old comrade would never recover young Edward’s death. By mine honour, it was long ere I could put the horrible recollection from mine own mind; and for Edmund, here, he cannot hear his friend’s name mentioned without growing pale as a love-sick girl. Sorry am I that my companion in many a stricken field should be slain by that slow and subtle foe—sorrow. My poor Pauncefort! Well, peace be with his spirit!’

Subduing the emotion the tidings had excited, the Baron then asked numberless questions of the new comer, respecting the state of the Court; the popularity of Leicester with the Commons; and the King’s present opinions—as far as they were known—of the crusade; promising Gerald that on the morrow morning he would present him to King Louis; and desiring him, as soon as he should have taken refreshment, to make use

of Edmund's local knowledge for billeting his followers in the town.

It was a relief to Gerald to find that Cicely's residence at the palace with Queen Marguerite's ladies would render an accidental meeting with her in her father's mansion impossible; and in the busy occupation of the remainder of the day, and the society of his former companions, he lost for a time the sense of his perplexities and sorrows.

The following morning he was presented to the royal leader of the crusade, and gave the usual tribute of reverential admiration to the majestic and gracious bearing of St. Louis. He was favourably and graciously received by the monarch. Edmund Fitzwalter, who studiously sought to be of service to him, presented him also to the Seneschal of Champagne, who gave him a cordial invitation to sup with his new friend at his house that evening, which Gerald accepted.

Pleased with the frank benevolence and quaint humour of his host, Pauncefort tarried at De Joinville's house till night closed in and the moon of Cyprus cast her pale light on the myrtle groves of the enchanting island. He returned to his quarters alone—for Edmund Fitzwalter had been obliged to leave the revel early—and was slowly retracing his road which passed near the palace, when a sudden cry and the clash of swords struck on his ear. Drawing his own weapon, he darted instantly into the thick grove from whence the sound issued, and beheld a cavalier defending himself gallantly against the attacks of three ruffians. Shouting his national war-cry, 'St. George to the rescue!' Pauncefort sprang to the knight's side, and was in a moment engaged in his quarrel. But two knightly antagonists (the latter of whom was also well armed) were more than a match for hired bravoës, and the assassins, after a bold

stroke or two, fled, leaving the stranger and the Englishman masters of the field. The former turned immediately to thank his ally for his assistance, and Gerald recognized the handsome features of the Count d'Artois, who had been pointed out to him that morning in the presence-chamber.

'You came in good time, Sir Knight,' said the prince, after warmly thanking him, 'for the villains attacked me from behind, and had wounded me ere I perceived their approach.' He pointed, as he spoke, to his shoulder, which was bleeding. 'It was fortunate that the blow was ill aimed,' he continued, 'or I should never again have sung lay of love beneath a lady's window.'

'An unsafe amusement, my good lord,' said the knight, not without a slight pang of jealousy, as he remembered to whom the lay had probably been addressed; 'an unsafe amusement in a land crowded with such a motley assemblage of all nations. But will you not hasten into the palace to have your wounded shoulder dressed? The rogues may return, and in greater number, knowing we are only two.'

'You counsel wisely, Sir Stranger,' said the Count: 'we will enter forthwith. I have apartments here, though of late I have chosen rather to abide with my brother of Poitiers and his fair Countess. You must accompany me, and tarry the night also, my brave defender, or they whose purpose you have crossed may take a deadly vengeance for the courteous rescue you brought me.'

Pauncefort thanked the prince, and frankly accepted his offer, and they proceeded together to the chief entrance of the palace. As they walked the Count informed himself of the name and nation of his defender, and by his courtesy and open bearing won on the already prepossessed fancy of his unknown

rival. They were received with due observance by such of the attendants as were still watchers. A leech was summoned in haste, and after seeing the prince's wound dressed, Pauncefort bade him good night, and was conducted to an adjoining chamber.

The English knight's slumbers in his new domicile were broken and disturbed. Frightful dreams haunted his pillow—now Edmund Fitzwalter, with his persuasive voice and sweet smile, stood before him, and placed the hand of his beloved Cicely in his, but as he bent to press it to his lips the figure changed, and Edward, pale, blood-stained, and wearing the same look of reproachful sadness which Gerald had fancied he discerned on the face of the dead, stood in her place, and pointing to Edmund, bade his brother 'Beware!' Again he dreamed, and now it was the suppressed jealousy which he could not overcome that shaped the phantoms of the night. He saw a bridal pass before him, a gay and splendid procession, such as befitted the wedding of a prince; and as they approached him, he perceived that it was Robert of Artois who led *his* Cicely to the altar. He fancied that he sprang forward, and catching her hand, implored her to remember their plighted vows of affection—his passionate love! And the veiled bride appeared to listen and to yield, but as she slowly lifted her veil the whole scene was again shifted—he was at Leighton Manor, and by the hall door stood Constance de Lingard, gazing upon him with her soft, melancholy eyes.

He rejoiced when he awoke, and beheld the early sunbeams stealing into his chamber. He rose at once, dressed, and descended to the hall of the palace. As he passed down the long gallery which led to it, the morning breeze came freshly through the jalousies (for the abode of Henry of Cyprus was

built after the model of an Eastern dwelling), inviting him to walk forth and enjoy it freely in the orange groves.

Passing through the bustling attendants who filled the hall, he walked out of the great portico, and strolling onwards, found himself in a few minutes in a perfect wood of orange and citron trees. Pursuing a narrow path which wound through it, he soon lost sight of the palace, and endeavoured, by walking quickly, to shake off the depression his restless night had caused.

At length the pathway widened, and Pauncefort came suddenly before a hedge of low myrtle trees enclosing an eastern garden. At this period the cultivation of gardens had become an object of interest to the English, and they had made some progress in the art of horticulture; but they were still far behind the southern nations of Europe, especially those who were in intimate connection and communication with the East; consequently, Gerald had never beheld anything like the scene before him. The fountain falling into its pure marble basin and throwing its silvery spray towards the blue sky, glittering and babbling in the sunlight,—the shady bowers, the sweet odours, the beauty of the gay flower-beds, riveted him to the spot. A voice calling him by name, in accents only too well remembered, roused him from his trance of pleasure, and turning eagerly and with a beating heart towards the sound, he beheld Cicely Fitzwalter standing beneath a pomegranate tree, alone, and more lovely than ever. Constance and his plighted honour were for a moment forgotten, and rushing towards her, he greeted her with a rapture he could not conceal, and read his own welcome in her blush and smile.

‘You are here at last, truant! yet, but for my matchless constancy, you would have come too late. The hand you would possess is sought by one unused to sue in vain, Gerald, and you



will have to rival the feats of Roland himself now to gain your promised bride.'

Her words, playfully uttered, recalled Gerald to himself. He grew pale and shuddered, taking the hand she offered him with an air of sorrowful and embarrassed respect.

'Most beloved lady,' he said, 'how proudly would I die to call this fair hand mine own for a brief moment. But, alas! I may aspire to that bliss no longer.'

'How mean you?' exclaimed the lady, gazing anxiously in his face; 'are you grown suddenly craven, or is this some new freak of conscience—some fantastic point of honour towards the Baron?'

'Of a truth, fair Cicely,' answered her lover, 'I have so heavy a heart that I may well chance to prove craven; yet do I fear nothing, save that which is worse than death to bear—your just indignation.'

'Speak plainly and briefly,' said the maiden, impatiently; 'what is this nameless fault for which you fear my anger? You have not *dared* to play me false?'

She grew very pale as she spoke, and her dark eyes flashed with a fierce and sudden light upon her former suitor, who (mingling with his narrative a thousand protestations of unchanged love and despair) related, in hurried and incoherent words, the story of his enforced troth-pledge to Constance. The lady listened in silence, and only her rigidly compressed lips, her firmly clasped hands, and deathlike paleness, betrayed with what deep emotion. As he concluded, she turned from him with an air of stately scorn.

'Farewell, Sir Gerald Pauncefort,' she said, bitterly; 'henceforth we meet as strangers. You have given me a shrewd lesson! I was, indeed, too lightly won, by one so far beneath me! Was

the vow you pledged to *me*, when in my girlish folly I deigned to smile on a poor country knight, less binding than that which a dying dotard urged upon you? Tell me not of "filial devotion," of your "dying sire's commands;" you had no right to violate the duty you owed to me—the duty of fidelity, of gratitude, of honour! Doubtless, the beauty of your brother's widowed love, who was "so sacred in your eyes,"—she repeated with bitter scorn the words he had formerly used in answer to her jesting allusions to her rival—'doubtless, the smile of the Lady Constance de Lingard was the sophistry which calmed your conscience, and reconciled you to the violation of your plighted word!'

'By all the saints, Cicely, you wrong me,' replied Pauncefort, in a tone of anguish; 'I do not love Constance; I can never love any one but you. My happiness is wholly gone; I have no hope for the future, and the memory of the past is bitterness. I pray only that I may leave my bones on the plains of Egypt, after showing you, by deeds of knightly daring, that I was not all unworthy of your love! Add not your displeasure to the burden of my misery. Speak but one word of pardon!'

He knelt on the green sward as he spoke, but she turned from him with haughty scorn, and was about to leave him, when a voice startled Pauncefort to his feet, and made the lady pause and glance back again. Her brow relaxed as she beheld her cousin Fitzwalter.

'So you are already at your lady's feet, Pauncefort?' said Edmund, regardless of the frown with which the knight encountered his glance; 'my lord Baron, fearing for your safety—as you returned not to your quarters last night after leaving the Seneschal's—hath dispatched messengers in all directions to find you, and requested me to aid in the search. He thought

not that I should find you paying your morning devotions at so fair a shrine!

'You have reason to marvel, Edmund,' replied Pauncefort, who, whilst the other spoke, had recovered his self-possession. 'But in truth it was unwittingly that I intruded on your cousin's solitude; and on my bended knee,'—and he knelt again with affected playfulness before the lady, his eyes earnestly appealing to her,—'I once more entreat her pardon. Forgive me, sweet lady, I implore you!'

There was a deep flush on Cicely's cheek, and a fierce light in her dark eyes, as she met his eager gaze.

'I have nothing to forgive, Sir Knight,' she said, haughtily, 'your intrusion being accidental; but I must request you to withdraw. This pleasance is sacred to the privacy of the Queen of France, and her Grace may be less disposed to pardon an intruder than I have been.'

She bowed with cold dignity, and, giving her hand to Fitzwalter, turned slowly down an opposite path, which led directly to the private entrance to the Queen's apartments. Gerald Pauncefort stood gazing after their retreating forms for some two or three seconds; then, with a heightened colour and beating heart, retraced his steps to the palace. He was met at the portal by a page, who, respectfully accosting him, informed him that the Count d'Artois craved his presence at his first leisure. Glad to escape from his own bitter and remorseful thoughts, the knight followed the boy to an apartment, in which Robert of Artois lay on a rich couch, engaged at the moment of their entrance in a vehement dispute with his leech, who stood beside the bed holding a cup, the contents of which he was vainly urging his royal patient to swallow.

'Here comes my English champion a second time to the

rescue,' Robert exclaimed, laughingly, as Gerald entered his room; 'come, valiant Paladin, and tell this dark enchanter that I will not be bound by his spell nor swallow his nostrum.'

'Rather, brave knight,' said the leech, 'assist me to persuade my lord Count to remain quiet for the day, at least, and to drink this potion, which is of sovereign efficacy to allay fever.'

'I will none of it, Bertrand Montreuil,' answered the wilful patient; 'Sir Gerald of England, I pray you dash the cup from his hand for me, or force him to drink the vile compound himself.'

'If you will not take the potion, at least, noble Count, remain quietly on your couch for a day,' implored the leech: 'his Grace will call my skill in question, if evil chances to you from this wound, which is deeper than you think.'

'Will you lighten my imprisonment by your company, Sir Knight, if I submit to my obstinate vassal's will?' asked Artois.

'Willingly, my lord,' was the reply; 'and methinks I have a tale to tell you, which will wile away the hours of inaction. It was my purpose to have sought an interview with you to-day, to deliver a message with which I am charged, and to impart to you a story that will, I am assured, deeply interest you.'

'Good faith! you make me as curious as a waiting gentlewoman,' said the prince, with renewed animation. 'Go, Sir Leech, and be thankful to your patron saint, that he hath sent this gallant gentleman to inspire obedience to you.'

The leech withdrew, and D'Artois eagerly desired the young Englishman to gratify his curiosity without delay.

Briefly and simply Gerald related the discovery of the wreck in the Atlantic, and the rescue of Wilfred and Eudocia. The Count d'Artois listened with much interest.

'Poor maiden!' he said; 'I grieve for her sufferings, and am thankful that you came in time to rescue the errant lovers.'

De Lucy was a brave lad, and I would gladly meet him, without any reference to our unequal rank, had he but won his spurs. I have met mine inferior ere now,' he added; 'one far less worthy of a prince's sword, if my judgment err not. Are you acquainted with Sir Edmund Fitzwalter?'

'I am, my lord. My family and myself are greatly bound to him; he was the sworn brother-at-arms of my late brother.'

'Forgive me if I pain you by the question,' continued the Count, 'but did the brother of whom you speak perish untimely?'

'He did, by the hand of an assassin.'

The prince was silent, and mused for some minutes, with a frowning brow.

'You will see Eudocia's father shortly, Sir Gerald?' he said, presently, starting from his reverie.

'I am bound to do so, as speedily as may be,' was the reply.

'Your visit will probably prevent any further attempts on my life,' continued D'Artois; 'the poor wretch has never been convinced that it was not I who stole his fair daughter from him, and he has persecuted me with incessant supplications to restore his child, besides making many fruitless efforts (of which I doubt not last night's affair was one) to avenge his supposed wrong by my death.'

'I shall hasten to correct so dangerous an error,' said Pouncefort; 'but I marvel, my lord, that you have suffered such a desperate foe to remain at freedom; or, at least, that, knowing you had such a one, you should venture out alone, and nearly unarmed, in his neighbourhood.'

'I would not add to his really heavy affliction by punishing his attempted crimes, since they affected only my own safety,' replied the Count; 'and for fearing him, I could not if I tried.'

The conversation then turned on general subjects. D'Artois

was eager to learn his companion's opinion of such of their brethren-at-arms as he had yet seen, and when Pauncefort pleaded want of sufficient penetration to learn their respective characters in so short a time, the prince sketched each of the motley group of leaders with a wit and truth of delineation that amused and charmed his auditor. At the name of William of Salisbury, however, he paused, and a cloud rested for a moment on his open brow.

'We will pass him over,' he said, coldly; 'I love him not, and yet cannot refuse him my esteem: he is sage in council, and, without doubt, bold in action; but your nation generally, Sir Knight, have not the gift of winning love.'

'I grieve that our noble Salisbury hath no place in your favour, Prince,' answered Pauncefort, gravely: 'he is the pride of our nation, and methinks there is a sufficient similarity between your characters to have made you fast friends.'

'*He* does not think so!' exclaimed Robert, with sudden vehemence; 'he checks me in council as if I were only a froward boy, and meets my just indignation with a cool haughtiness that would stir the blood of the veriest craven! I hate the proud islander.'

Pauncefort was gravely silent; and ashamed the next moment of his impetuosity, D'Artois extended his hand to him.

'Forgive me, my brave preserver,' he said, with heightened colour; 'my dislike of your nation, generally, it is not in my nature to conceal; but for yourself individually I have formed a liking which will, I am full sure, last as long as it has taken root suddenly. Will you accept the friendship I proffer you?'

'Ay, noble Robert,' said the young knight, 'right willingly; but I must pray you of your courtesy to forbear further ani-

madversions on my countrymen. I will yet teach you to love our England !'

D'Artois smiled incredulously, and was about to answer when he was interrupted by a rap at the chamber door.

'Raise the arras, I pray you, Pauncefort,' he said, 'and admit one whom you will, when you know him, tender dearly—the footstep without is that of Regnier d'Arcy. And truly it is time both for you and me to partake of our morning meal.'



## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE PROMISE FULFILLED.

I am glad at soul I have no other child.

SHAKSPEARE.

AS soon as Prince Robert could be induced to suffer him to depart, Sir Gerald set out for the home of the Greek. He had been told the road by Eudocia herself, and thoughts of the maiden as she lay on the wreck returned vividly as he entered the grove where first the poor child had met De Lucy.

Under the trees, pacing slowly up and down with a volume in his hand, he perceived a tall and stately man, clad in the long dark robe of a priest or student.

As the knight rode up he glanced round, and Pauncefort perceived by the general likeness of his chiselled features to Eudocia's, that he beheld Paul Comnenus. Alighting from his horse, he saluted the Greek courteously in *lingua-Franca*.

‘I bring you, Signor Comnenus, tidings and greetings from one who is dear to you.’

The Greek changed countenance for a moment, then answered with cold courtesy,

‘You speak under a delusion, Sir Knight. I am a lonely man,—loving none, and beloved by none.’

‘Say not so, I beseech you,’ exclaimed Pouncefort, eagerly; ‘you are tenderly loved and honoured by one whom nature commands you to cherish.’

‘If you come to speak to me of her who was once my daughter, Sir Knight, I must beseech you to be silent. Never again may *her* name be uttered in my presence.’

‘Nay, but you *must* hear me, Signor Comnenus, for your wrongful suspicions are constantly tempting you to imperil the life of a most innocent man. Believe me, Prince Robert is well aware who instigated the braves from whom I last night happily rescued him, but his compassion for the loss you have sustained induces him to leave all your base attempts on his life unresented. It was not for the prince’s sake that the Lady Eudocia fled from her home.’

‘Are you sent by Robert of Artois to try to delude me with the old improbable tale about the escape of the English squire?’ asked Comnenus, scornfully, leaving the knight’s direct accusation of the attempted assassination unanswered.

‘Nay, he sends me not. I speak from my own knowledge, and come to tell you that I found your only child Eudocia and young Wilfred de Lucy, nephew of the great Sir Walter, perishing on a wreck in the Atlantic: I saved both her and him; and she would fain have returned to endure any chastisement your just anger might inflict. But I took counsel of Sir Almeric de Brienne, a knight of St. John, who was my comrade on the



voyage, and we decided that the best remedy for your injured honour was to wed the damsel to her boy lover, and speed them to his English home.'

Then, encouraged by the silence of his hearer, the knight related in full detail 'beginning at the beginning,' the story of Eudocia and Wilfred's love. Paul Comnenus listened with silent cold attention. When the knight ceased, he replied,

'I would rather you had told me of my daughter's death upon the wreck, than of her union with one of your hated nation. But henceforward I have no daughter. My curse has rested heavily on her, and will never leave her. Speak to me of her no more!'

'Shame on you, discourteous Greek!' exclaimed the knight, greatly provoked; 'you should rather thank our Lady and the saints for your daughter's safety and honourable bestowal in wedlock, than utter such unchristian words. The damsel failed in her duty, but she repenteth truly, and it becomes not sinful man to refuse forgiveness.'

'Nevertheless I do refuse it,' said the Greek, sternly. 'Henceforth, as I have said, I have no child. The only answer I will ever deign to the false damsel's entreaties, I send to her now by you, her doughty champion—my curse!'

'Were it not shame for a Red Cross knight to shiver lance with an assassin,' exclaimed Gerald, 'I would force you to answer for your insolence, Greek. But no honourable man can deign you the courtesy of battle. I leave you, therefore; but, remember, that any future attempt on the life of Prince Robert of France will be answered for by your own. The fair Eudocia has small cause to fear the curse of a would-be murderer.'

The knight sprang to his saddle as he uttered these contemptuous words, and setting spurs to his horse rode off rapidly.

The Greek looked after him with an expression of malignity on his features, which it would have startled Pauncefort had he seen it.

‘Disgraced—defeated—scorned!’ he murmured. ‘But my turn is yet to come! Shades of my kingly sires, hear me while I swear revenge on the whole of these insolent Franks. Ay! I will accompany them to Egypt—I also will wear the Cross; but it shall be to betray it to the crescent, and wash out the stain upon the honour of the Comneni in the blood of the whole host of the warriors of the West.’



## CHAPTER XXXI.

## UNSTABLE AS WATER.

Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,  
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and won,  
Than women's are.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE palace of Limisso was thronged with martial guests. It was the anniversary of Henry de Lusignan's birth, and he feasted with right royal magnificence the King of France and his chivalrous allies. The banquet was over, and the splendid group of Kings, princes, warriors, and ladies were assembled in the dancing-hall—the fair Queens of France and Cyprus seated in ‘their state,’ whilst Louis and his royal host stood near, conversing with them or their attendant ladies.

‘My Marguerite,’ said Louis, as his brother of Artois approached them, followed by a young knight, ‘Robert is, by

my desire, bringing his preserver from a violent death to receive your thanks and commendations. Give him one of your sweetest smiles, *ma belle Reine*, as his *guerdon*.'

Marguerite of Provence turned graciously towards her royal brother-in-law, as he presented Sir Gerald Pauncefort, and as the knight bent to press the hand she extended to his lips, she thanked him for his gallant defence of Prince Robert, in a tone so musical, and with so sweet a smile, that Gerald no longer marvelled Louis had been unwilling (despite the warning of his ancestor's example) to leave so bright and gentle a being, but had, against the dictates of his usual prudence, allowed her to share his dangers in the East. Marguerite was equally struck by the personal beauty of the young stranger, and many a bright eye glanced admiringly towards him, as he raised his head, and acknowledged the fair Queen's thanks modestly and briefly. But of all that lovely bevy of maidens and stately dames, the knight saw but one.

Cicely Fitzwalter, more radiant in loveliness than ever, stood immediately behind the royal chair. She was splendidly attired in a graceful *robe quintise* of blue velvet, richly embroidered; her long raven tresses, carefully braided and fastened at the ends by sparkling gems, hung on each fair shoulder; and many a pearl of price linked together the lustrous sapphires that encircled her white throat and soft rounded arms. Never had the glow of her cheek boasted a richer tint, never had her dark eyes glittered with a more dazzling lustre; nor did they turn away, or seek the earth, as they encountered those of her former lover, but met his gaze with a scornful indifference that brought a deep flush to his cheek. The flush was succeeded by a deadly paleness, and the young stranger, losing the air of graceful self-possession which usually distinguished him, drew

back from the circle with a haste and embarrassment that surprised Prince Robert, and brought a smile of triumph to the lip of the haughty maid of honour. Her cousin, who had been a silent spectator of the scene, stole gently to her side.

‘He loves you still, Cicely,’ he whispered.

‘Ay,’ she replied in a low tone; ‘the poor fool is, in truth, as he said, the victim of his tender conscience. I could lull it to rest, and bind him my captive more firmly than ever if I would, but he shall first dearly rue having wavered in his allegiance.’

‘Woman-like, sweet cousin,’ said Edmund, ‘you are glad of a pretext for playing the tyrant. But remember your cause is mine, and if this cold half-priest, half-soldier, should play you false, in sober earnest my sword shall avenge the insult offered to you.’

‘I will remember your promise,’ she answered, ‘but I do not believe his inconstancy will require more than the penance I shall inflict, which will be a heavy one. Thank Heaven, he is not really wedded to this Constance! But hush, here comes my fiery prince to lead me to the dance. Now will I smile sweetly on him, to torture yonder traitor,’ and she glanced towards the spot where Gerald stood, an observer of her every gesture. Nor did she err in believing that every smile she bestowed upon her royal suitor inflicted a pang on the heart of Pauncefort. He had taught himself to believe that he should rejoice if she ceased to love him—that he wished she would accept the prince, and save him the misery of believing he had blighted her happiness; but once more in her presence—once more under the spell of her matchless beauty, all was forgotten save his love and his despair, and the tortures of a jealousy which he strove vainly to repress. He turned from gazing on her graceful coquetry with a brow contracted by anguish, and

with a sigh so deep, that Sir Regnier d'Arcy, who was standing near him, started.

'Are you ill, Sir Gerald?' asked the young Provençal.

'No, but weary of this protracted revelry, and of the intense heat. Will you walk with me in the adjoining gallery? The air will be fresher there.'

'I have news for you,' said D'Arcy, as he complied with his request; and they left the hall. 'The Greek, Paul Comnenus, is come to Limisso. Can you divine for what purpose?'

'No, i' faith; nor do I greatly care, brave D'Arcy. His relentless animosity—the unnatural want of feeling he displayed when I related to him the sufferings and rescue of his child, disgusted me with him. I take no interest in his proceedings.'

'But you must hear my news,' urged the knight. 'He came yester-eve to the prince, and acknowledged, though haughtily enough, that he had been in error with regard to him, and that he had many times, in consequence, attempted his life. The last of these attempts you happily defeated. He added that he regretted his violence, and, in atonement for his intended crime, had resolved to take the Cross. Also he prayed the prince to allow him to travel with his followers as a peaceful pilgrim.'

'And what said the Count?'

'Marry, he forgave him frankly, and told him he was right welcome to accompany us.'

'You will do well to watch his proceedings though, methinks, Sir Regnier: his nation are false and subtle, and this sudden change may hide some deep scheme.'

'I will watch him well,' said D'Arcy, 'for I also distrust him.'

They continued to converse for some time on this subject, as they paced the gallery or leaned beside the open jalousies to inhale the balmy air of evening. They were standing com-

pletely concealed by the shadow, for the corridor was but dimly lighted, when footsteps were heard approaching, and two persons advanced slowly towards them, in gay converse.

‘You do him wrong, sweet Cicely, in good faith you do,’ said one of the speakers, whom they recognized as the Count d’Artois; ‘I cannot believe him to be of a light and variable nature!’

‘A very feather blown about by every wind,’ answered his fair companion. ‘Count not on his friendship, Prince Robert. You might as well lean on a broken reed, as trust to the wavering faith of Gerald Pauncefort!’

‘He is an unwilling listener to your words, lady,’ said a low and somewhat tremulous voice, ‘and grieves that you so much misjudge him.’

For a moment, as Gerald advanced, the proud Cicely was disconcerted, but, almost instantly, she recovered her self-possession.

‘You have suffered the usual fate of eavesdroppers, Sir Knight,’ she said with a gay, cold laugh; ‘but I repeat my words in your presence. It were far better to place faith in running water, or changing clouds, than in yourself. And now, my Lord of Artois, take me back to the hall: I knew not whither you were leading me. This gallery is too dark and chilling.’

‘By my faith! the lady speaks feelingly of your inconstant spirit,’ said D’Arcy, as the prince and lady disappeared: ‘were I you, I should feel not a little proud of having piqued the haughty damsel so deeply, Pauncefort.’

‘Proud of her contempt—of her hatred!’ replied his companion, in a tone of such deep anguish, that the gay Provençal hushed his light laugh in an instant.

'Ay, proud,' he added, as Gerald paused; 'for you must have awakened a lively interest in her mind to cause her to denounce you so energetically. Pray Heaven you prove not a dangerous rival to my prince, in spite of the fickle faith of which the lady complains so bitterly!'

'You mock me, Sir Regnier,' said Pauncefort. 'I am grieved that I should have incurred the displeasure of the lady, for she once distinguished me by her friendship; but Count Robert has no rival to fear in me. I am betrothed to a peerless lady in our England, and my constancy to her shall prove,'—he spoke with some bitterness,—'whether I am, in truth, the weak fool that Cicely Fitzwalter deems me.'

'Is it so, in truth? Nay, then I comprehend it all. But I will not impart my suspicions to the prince, who would be rendered miserable by them, nor will I suffer him to be prejudiced by the lady against you, Pauncefort. But let us follow them to the hall.'

Cicely kept her word, and but for Regnier D'Arcy would have succeeded in making the English knight's abode at Cyprus a period of torture. But the good-natured Provençal combated the prejudices against his friend, which her scornful and sarcastic remarks excited in the mind of Artois, and by his friendly importunities won the young Englishman from the solitary indulgence of a regret, which he had sufficient penetration to discover and kindly feeling enough to pity. He skilfully prevented too frequent meetings between Gerald and his former love—rode, hawked, and hunted with him—or persuaded him to aid in disciplining Artois' followers; and thus the time fled, till the long-desired period for embarkation arrived.

The Mediterranean was covered with masts, as the numerous

fleet of the crusaders left the harbour of Limisso, and stood out to sea. The breeze was fresh and favourable; the sun shone brightly on the white sails and glancing pennons; and as the fair Cyprus disappeared, and the bounding waves rose before the prows of their vessels, as if to greet them, the spirits of the pilgrims rose, and with revived hope and enthusiasm they looked forward to the termination of their holy enterprise.

Gerald Paucefort leaned against the side of the ship, in silent thought, apparently regardless of the presence of the Lady Cicely, who sat beside her father near the stern of the vessel, enjoying the enlivening sea-breeze, whilst Edmund hovered near them, occasionally chatting to his uncle, or directing his cousin's attention to the merry denizens of the waters that sported and played in their track.

'What ails Pauncefort, Edmund?' asked the old noble, abruptly, as he remarked the abstracted air of his young favourite. 'He was wont to be full of both mirth and matter, a foe to gloom and solitude, and now he looks as solemn as Henry de Lusignan's confessor.'

'In faith, my lord, I know not,' was the reply: 'the knight is either sick or sorry, without doubt; but I am no magician to be able to determine the cause.'

'Call him hither,' said the Baron; 'we will not suffer him to be idle, Cicely. He has beguiled many a weary hour for us in England, and his *trouveur* skill will not be unwelcome now, for the time will pass but heavily whilst we are cooped up in our ships. Call him hither.'

Pauncefort obeyed the summons, and could not refuse the Baron's request (though it was not seconded by the lady), that he would exercise his talents as a *raconteur* for their amusement. Seating himself at a little distance from the Baron and



his daughter, he began—in tones to which his own feelings lent a pathos—a tale of the hopeless misery of one who loved above his degree, and who gave his own life to save that of the rival whom she he vainly worshipped loved.

Evening closed in ere the romaunt was finished, and with the sunset the breeze freshened. The lady, with a slight shiver, rose to go below, and the knight, by her father's command, offered his support to steady her steps across the deck, for the vessel was no longer gliding over a smooth and tranquil sea. Silently she accepted it, and at her cabin door turned to render him cold but courteous thanks. She had not seen him for many days before their embarkation, and as she raised her eyes to his face, she was struck by its paleness and languid expression.

'You are ill, Gerald!' she exclaimed, her anger and revenge for the moment forgotten; 'very ill!'

He caught the hand she extended to him.

'Cicely!' he replied, in a tone tremulous with emotion and delight, 'bless you for that pitying tone. I am ill—miserable—but one word of forgiveness, of sympathy from you, will enable me at least to endure my wretched existence. Say but that you forgive me!'

'I do—I do, Gerald,' she said. 'Let the past be forgotten! we can still be friends.'

From that hour the Knight of Leighton was again the thrall of Cicely Fitzwalter. He hushed the reproaches of his conscience by the plea that she knew he was betrothed to another; that his daily and hourly devotion to her was but the courteous attendance due to his leader's daughter; his renewed love only a sincere and brotherly affection. Alas! for poor Constance de Lingard! It was well that she, who had passed many a

sleepless night listening to every blast of the rude wind, as it moaned or howled through the forest trees, praying and weeping as she thought of him who was exposed to its fury on the vast ocean, could not know how totally she was forgotten—how brief had been the impression made on his mind, by her noble self-denial, her patient, womanly virtues. And yet he had himself believed all he professed to her in the porch of Leighton Church; nor did he quite perceive the danger and dishonour threatening him by the renewed smiles of the enchantress, or he would have shunned the deck of the galley as he would a lazaret-house. But he was firm in his own strength of purpose and plighted honour; and heedless of the pain the indulgence of his present inclination must cause to one or other of the maidens, he lingered by Cicely's side, morning and evening, in sunshine and in storm, till the voyage terminated, and the Oriflamme was unfurled on the shores of the ancient Egypt.

Alas! we are unable to calculate or foresee how much evil may be caused by our weakness or self-indulgence. It was on those sunny waves, shut up as it were with the only man who had ever touched her heart, that the love of Cicely Fitzwalter became a passion so intense and overmastering that conscience and principle vanished before it. Always self-willed and vain, Cicely was unlikely to resist a strong temptation. The very fact of her rivalry with Constance added a zest to her resolve to win back her former lover; and when he yielded to her influence and became her unacknowledged but undoubted thrall, no feeling of honour on her own part, no regard for his, lessened the joy with which she secretly called him her own. While with her love, grew an intense hatred and jealousy of the unconscious and injured Constance.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## A REAPPEARANCE.

You must know,  
I am supposed dead.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE strong city of Damietta fell almost unresistingly into the hands of the invaders. The Saracen host drawn up to oppose their landing, fled panic-stricken at the first onset of the French chivalry; and Louis and his mighty band of warriors made themselves, with almost incredible ease, masters of the town, and of the wealth and persons of such of the inhabitants as remained within the walls. The cruelty and rapacity with which the crusaders stained their glory, and misused this first fruit of their enterprise, were deeply regretted by their noble leader; but Louis had no power to control the fierce multitude that his mistaken zeal had brought from the West to oppress and harass the Moslem. Rapine and murder stalked, in the face of day, in the streets of the miserable city, in which the King unwillingly remained till the subsiding of the Nile and the arrival of his brother, the Count of Poitiers, with the *arrière* van of France, should allow him to march forward, and spend the fierce energies of his lawless followers in battle with the Saracens.

The spears of England, controlled by the brave Earl of Salisbury, were guiltless of the worst enormities which disgraced their allies; and their quarter of the town—which they shared with some of the Lord de Joinville's followers—if, alas! less

clean, and presenting more of the customs of a half barbarous people, than those of France or Burgundy—was, at least, unstained by murder or cowardly outrage.

About a week after their establishment in their new abode, an English knight issued from this part of the city, and directed his steps towards the dwelling of the Queen of France, a deserted palace, which had probably been the home of an Emir's family, till the approach of danger had driven them to seek shelter in the interior of the country. There were few persons in the street, for it was noon, and the intense heat rendered it more agreeable to remain within shelter; but he who now walked in the glare of the burning sun appeared heedless of all external inconveniences, being wholly lost in reverie, which, to judge from the frown on his handsome brow, was of no pleasing nature. As he thus proceeded, absorbed in thought, his path was suddenly crossed by a man closely muffled, who stood directly before him, fixed his eyes with insolent assurance in his face, and rendered it impossible, by his position, for the knight to pass, without stepping on one side. Fitzwalter raised his eyes, and was about to rebuke this insolence sharply, when, encountering those of the ruffian before him, he started, and stood for a moment pale, motionless, and speechless.

'Give you good day, Sir Knight,' said the stranger. 'I could not remain in Damietta longer without seeking you out—just to learn if I can in aught please you. You were used to find me a faithful servant, and I am at present out of employ.'

'Art *thou* here?' exclaimed the knight, recovering his self-possession by a strong effort; 'I thought the sea had thee in its keeping.'

'I am proud to relieve your knightly anxiety on my behalf, Sir Edmund. I did not sail in the Trenc-le-Mere, being detained

by certain circumstances which I will explain in a more retired spot, if it please you to grant me a hearing.'

'Follow me,' said the knight, sternly; 'I, also, have much to ask you.' And walking at a rapid pace, they speedily gained a deserted and pillaged mansion, in an obscure corner of the city. Entering one of its despoiled apartments, the knight seated himself on a piece of broken furniture, and hurriedly commanded the bravo to tell him what he had done with Alinor Perrot.

'I carried her to London, as you desired, Sir Knight,' he answered; 'but while the master of our vessel and myself were drinking your health in a cup of wine, the damsel, who learned then from our chat that she was going on her travels, took alarm, and ran out of the house into the streets. We chased her, and had just come up with our prize, when two gallants from Westminster interfered, and took her from us. I could not sail without *her*, and as time, tide, and a fair wind wait for no man, the Trenc-le-Mere sailed without *me*.'

'Villain!' said Fitzwalter, 'wherefore came you not to tell me of this mischance?'

'I' faith, Sir Knight, I cared not just then to meet the anger I knew my evil fortune would bring on me; and I should even now have allowed you to believe me dead, had I not learned from one of Sir Gerald of Leighton's retainers, that no harm is likely to befall you from it, since the unlucky damsel was found dead on a snow-drift, near her home; and as she could blab no secrets, the Paunceforts are as far as ever from suspecting who was the true robber of the yeoman's snug nest.'

'Ay, I remember,' said Fitzwalter, in a low tone, communing with himself rather than addressing his companion; 'the churl so informed Prince Robert. Poor Nelly! her death lies not

at my door. I would not willingly have wrought her further injury !’

He took two or three hasty turns up and down the room, and then stopping suddenly, confronted his villanous confidant, who sat with folded arms, gazing on the knight’s troubled countenance with insolent curiosity.

‘I fear me, sirrah !’ said Fitzwalter, sternly, ‘that if the truth could be known, I should find you guiltier in the matter of the girl’s death than you would have me believe.’

‘By my faith, Sir Knight, I never beheld the wench after she fled from John Pigott and me in London. I learned her fate only a short time before I left England, from a comrade of mine who dwelt near the yeoman’s homestead.’

‘And was it to him thou didst betray the secret thou wert so solemnly bound to conceal?’

Dickon started, and looked with a bewildered air on his interrogator.

‘What mean you, Sir Edmund?’ he asked, sullenly; ‘I have betrayed no secrets.’

‘Villain !’ said Fitzwalter, ‘deny it not; for the wretch who possessed a knowledge which was fatal to him—as it shall be to thee, an thou take not good heed—was but too truly informed of *that* which had no witness save thee and Heaven.’

The man-at-arms turned pale, but rallying himself, answered with effrontery,

‘Now, by all the saints, whoever the rogue was, he must have gained his knowledge by art magic, for, as I hope to obtain pardon for my sins by fighting the Saracens, I never breathed a syllable of the matter to living man.’

‘Thou canst not deceive me by thy lying assertion,’ said Sir Edmund, menacingly. ‘But, beware how thou breathest a

word of the matter to other ears. For, the rest, I know thee for a bold, shrewd, serviceable villain—a useful follower for one whose blood flows not in so leaden a course as that of the common herd. Therefore thou mayest again join my following; but hold no intercourse with the Leighton spearmen, and curb thy tongue, an thou dost not wish to lose it.'

'I am your true and obedient vassal, Sir Edmund,' replied the ruffian, boldly; 'but I lack a few pieces of money to make my exterior worthy of the servant of so gallant a master.'

'Some six or eight months past your purse was tolerably well supplied,' said Fitzwalter, 'for the use both of yourself and of the wretched girl who never required it.'

'It is all spent,' was the sullen answer, 'and I lack now both food and raiment.'

'I warn you,' said the knight, impatiently, 'that my year's revenue has been greatly diminished by the expenses of the crusade, nor have I now any money about me; but come to my lodging to-night, after dark, and I will give you what I can spare. And once more beware, sirrah, of too free speech, or the secret that—after a sort—unites us, shall not save thee from my wrath.'

'I will be silent as death, Sir Knight.'

'It is well. Now thou mayest go; I will question thee at more length this evening.'

He waved his hand, motioning his armed and desperate companion to precede him out of the chamber.

They parted in the street, and Fitzwalter pursued the way he was traversing when the unwelcome apparition of him whom he had supposed drowned had interrupted him. He had been constantly tortured, since his meeting with the miller, by the apprehension that Dickon would again appear, and his fears

were now realized. He was again in the power of his rude dependant, whose rapacious demands he was ill able, at the time, to satisfy ; but Cicely was always rich, and ever willing to supply his wants, and to her he now resolved to apply.

He found the beautiful maid of honour seated on a pile of low cushions, in a room furnished with all the luxuries of the East. Before her stood a tall slight figure, in the garb of an Arab Hakim, or physician, with whom she was in earnest conversation ; but on the entrance of her cousin she dismissed him, and, though her cheek was slightly flushed, and she looked anxious and preoccupied, she gave Edmund an affectionate and glad welcome.

‘ You are not ill, I trust, dear Cicely,’ he asked, anxiously, retaining her hand for a moment in his own, ‘ that your favoured leech is with you ?’

‘ No, Edmund, I am well ; but I have been employing the services of the sage Ismaël for a friend, who is not, I fear, as strong in health as those who love him would wish.’

‘ You are benevolent, lady !’ said her cousin, gaily, seating himself beside her. ‘ I can guess for whom your influence with the Hakim is exercised. Nay, blush not, Cicely. I came to congratulate you on your recovered captive. You cannot deny that Sir Gerald of Leighton lives but in your presence.’

‘ That he loves me, I never doubted,’ she replied ; ‘ but he will die rather than break his promise to his dead father ; and the sole effect of your counsel, “ that I should pardon him, and win back my almost liberated captive by gentleness,” has been to make him my slave in truth, but so harassed by remorse, doubt, and fluctuating feeling, that our meetings are painful, and his health endangered by constant struggles between his conscience and his love. You smile, Edmund ; but I tell you,



this is no woman's fancy. The Count d'Artois only yester-eve regretted to me the altered appearance and declining strength of his English friend and favourite.'

'Perchance the climate agrees not with him,' said Edmund, coldly; 'but fear not, all shall end well yet, sweet coz. The report of his devotion to you on the voyage hath been already noised abroad, and it shall be my care that the news travel speedily as they may, to England. Keep him ever in your company in public. Let all men see his love, and leave it then to Constance de Lingard herself to set him free. Womanly pique, or—in *her*, perhaps—generosity, will surely release her reluctant lover from his vows.'

'And if she does not, *death* may,' said his cousin, laying her hand on her kinsman's arm, and fixing her bright dark eyes with a fearful expression on his face. '*Her* death I mean! It were better that she slept quietly in the grave, than that *he* should drag on a life of wretchedness. You wot well,' she continued, for Edmund only looked on her in silent surprise, 'that in the havoc which followed the taking of Damietta, I saved an Arab leech's life, by sending some of my own escort to deliver him from the murderous soldiery: his gratitude binds him to my service. He is skilled in much strange lore, and knoweth of many subtle poisons, which destroy life without pain, and betray not their work when death hath followed them. Had I a trusty knave whom I could dispatch to Leighton, this foolish Constance should cross my path no longer. Know *you* of one whom I might trust?'

How hideous do our own sins appear when we behold them reflected in another! Cicely spoke but as he had acted, and yet Edmund heard her with a chill shudder of horror and disgust.

‘Cicely,’ he said, ‘I cannot look on you at this moment without thinking of the old Queen of the Saracens, who once ruled this land (of whom Father Hugh hath often told me), whose witcheries lured men to their destruction—you look so like an angel, and speak so like a fiend.’

‘Prate not to me of fiends or angels, Edmund,’ interrupted his cousin, impatiently, ‘but answer me; you are bound by your plighted vow to aid me! Know you of a trusty agent?’

‘No, on my honour!’ he exclaimed; ‘nor would I tell you if I did. I would not see a hair of her fair head injured for aught the earth could offer me! Dear cousin,’ he continued, as he remarked the astonishment with which she heard him, ‘think not that you would win happiness by such a deed. Believe me, it is no fable that the curse of God rests ever on the head of him who hath shed blood. The fear that dogs his steps—the night that never again knows quiet slumber—the unquenchable remorse—none can conceive before they feel them. Oh, Cicely! dread—shun them.’

He spoke with frightful vehemence, and the maiden turned pale as she listened.

‘For his sake I could bear anything,’ she murmured.

‘Nay, dream not of it! Be assured that, when Constance de Lingard knows that her betrothed is bound to her by honour only, she will reject him,—ay, and with scorn, if she knew all. Beware of attempting aught against her life, and I promise you that your priest-lover—who had far better have remained a Templar—shall be yet your own.’

The lady shook her head. ‘You promise boldly,’ she said; ‘but I will have patience for a time, Edmund. Were he even now free, I could not hope for my lord and father’s sanction to his suit, till he had won a renown that might justify it.’

'Hope all things, fairest coz. And now I am going to tax your friendship. Can you lend a poor soldier a few broad pieces?'

'Surely,' said the lady, 'my purse is ever at your service. Take it, and never fear troubling me by such requests.'

He kissed the hand which presented it, and, after promising to bring Pauncefort with him to the evening banquet, bade her farewell.

'The beautiful fiend!' he thought, as he retraced his steps to his quarters, 'who could have dreamed of such evil and deadly passions beneath so fair an exterior? And Pauncefort! the vain, book-learned fool! to cast away the precious jewel of Leighton, for this false brilliant. But Constance shall meet with no harm at her hands, I swear by St. George!'



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE LOST BATTLE.

'Eloignez de mes yeux ce monument funeste  
De la fureur des nations,  
O mort ! épargne ce qui reste,  
Varus ! rends-nous nos légions.'

DELAUVIGNE.

THE mighty host of Western warriors was at length in motion, the subsiding of the Nile having allowed the crusaders to quit Damietta, in which stronghold they left the Queen, her ladies, and some few knights—together with the Baron Fitzwalter, who was detained by illness—and two or three inferior

vassals of the crown, to whose charge Louis committed his fair Queen Marguerite. On their route to the plains of Babylon, the soldiers of the Cross encamped on an island, formed by the Thanisian Canal and the Nile, intending to cross from thence to Rexi ; but the construction of a causeway to the opposite shore proved a work of difficulty and delay ; for the Saracens, by continually undermining and digging away the banks, constantly increased the distance between themselves and the invaders. The works were also destroyed by a species of Greek fire employed by the Infidels, and the continual obstacles to their departure from their island camp damped the ardour and depressed the spirits of the crusaders.

At the close of a bright, hot day, during this state of wearying inactivity, Sir Gerald Pauncefort sat at his tent door, enjoying the refreshing breeze of evening, and listening in quiet abstraction to the murmuring of the ancient river, near the banks of which he had fixed his temporary abode. A heavy presentiment of some approaching evil weighed on his spirits, which he vainly endeavoured to shake off. As is frequently the case at such moments, the remembrances which floated through his mind of past scenes of happiness were unusually distinct. His memory pictured vividly the green woods of Leighton—his noble and high-spirited mother—the lovely and gentle Constance ; and with the depressing thought—which had all the strength and reality of assurance—that he should behold them no more, came a renewal of the pure and holy affection for both, which had slumbered in the late enthrallment of his senses. He reproached himself for having forgotten them—for having given the thoughts and attentions due only to her, beside whom he had stood a plighted bridegroom in the chamber of death, to another. That circumstance now

appeared to give such a sanctity to his engagements with Constance, that his recent devotion to her haughty rival appeared in its true light; and he marvelled much at the self-deceiving sophistry which had reconciled him to playing the part of a lover to Cicely, on the Southern Sea and in the conquered Damietta. The honourable resolutions which were the result of this self-communing were interrupted by the sudden appearance of the Count d'Artois, who approached him with a countenance beaming with exultation.

'Arouse thee, thou melancholy knight,' he cried, laying his hand on Gerald's shoulder, 'arouse thee! I bring thee tidings which will send thy slow island blood more quickly through thy veins. We march to-morrow.'

'You jest, surely, my lord?' said the Englishman.

'No, in good faith. It is sober, delightful earnest. An Arab—one of the thieves called Bedouins—hath, for a large reward, offered to show us a ford across this hateful river, and to-morrow evening we may sleep in Massoura.'

Pauncefort smiled faintly as he expressed his satisfaction. A weight was on his heart, and the tidings which, at another time, would have roused him as a trumpet-call, fell like a knell on his ear.

'Fie, what a smile was that!' added his light-hearted friend; 'art thou sick or sorry, Gerald, that thou hearest my glad tidings with such a cold indifference? Methought thou hadst cast off the spells of the foul fiend, Melancholy, since the fair enchantress, Cicely, broke his charm. By my faith, had I not known of thy troth-plight to the fair maiden of Leighton before then, I should have been jealous of thy late favour with my lady.'

Gerald's face was averted from the young Count as he replied,

‘You have no cause to be, my good lord : the lady hath vowed by her patron saint to smile on the bravest, and were I free to woo her favour, I should have small hope of excelling Prince Robert of France in valour.’

‘Now, by St. Denis, Pauncefort, you are becoming a rare courtier ! It will be difficult to tell, probably, among so many valiant gentlemen, who hath borne himself most like a hero ; but I will not lose Cicely through lack of courage or of confidence. I will do deeds that Roland hath never equalled, to-morrow ! I would only that *I* had the ordering of the battle—the Templars should not *then* have the post of honour.’

‘Do the Temple knights lead the van ?’ asked Gerald, always interested in the Order of which he had so nearly become a member.

‘Ay ; so at least the leaders and his Grace have ordained in council ; but *I* lead the second division, and if I be not on the other side of the river before those haughty Red Cross knights, may I never win my lady’s love !’

‘Say not so, noble Artois,’ said the knight, earnestly ; ‘you are too good a soldier not to know the importance of discipline—above all, in such a mixed army ; and if you, the King’s brother, set the example of disobedience, what may not be the consequence to our enterprise ?’

‘Croak not so like a raven,’ replied the prince, impatiently ; ‘your Longsword Earl rides in my division with his lances, and you will therefore be near me, to temper our Frank valour with your English prudence. Montjoie St. Denis ! how I long to be upon the dogs of Mahound. But I cannot tarry longer with you. I am going to consult my old star-gazing enemy of other days, Paul Comnenus, as to the fortunes of to-morrow. Will you join us at supper ?’

'Willingly, my lord; but—I beseech you, pardon me—I must once more repeat my earnest entreaty, that you will beware of the Greek.'

'Tush!' said Artois, impatiently; 'you and D'Arcy weary me by your eternal prudence. What if he did attempt my life? It was under a false impression, and he had no other means of avenging himself. Now I have not a warmer friend or a more faithful follower.'

Pauncefort knew the prince's pertinacious adherence to his own opinions too well to hope that further interference would be of any avail, and, with a sigh, saw him take the direction leading to the Greek's tent. Artois found Paul Comnenus alone, and was greeted by him with much show of respect and affection.

'You have heard the news, Signor Paul?' he said, as he accepted the seat the Greek offered him. 'We march to-morrow! Did your stars give you any prior hint of this good fortune?'

'Ay, noble Count! it was but yesternight I studied their bright records in compliance with your will.'

'And what said they?' asked the prince, eagerly.

'Their language was plainer than usual,' said the seer: 'they promise victory to the Christian army, *if* no cold prudence or delay prevent its reaping the benefit of a fortunate conjunction of the planets.'

'And for myself?'

'Your star, and the star of your house, the brilliant Sirius, is in the ascendant; but near it lurks the planet Saturn, threatening you with false friends, cold councils, and treacherous opposition to your will. Act for yourself, gallant Artois, and to-morrow shall crown you with a hero's glory; follow the advice of others, and you will meet dishonour and defeat.'

'Fear it not, friend,' said the credulous soldier, 'fear it not;

I will make my own way to-morrow, and heed neither King nor council. What think you? It is intended that the Temple shall have the post of honour in the coming battle—that *my* division shall be the second to cross the river! We will see if the Templar steeds can outstride my matchless Lydyard.'

The Greek smiled gravely. 'They who greatly dare, win Immortality,' he said; 'Fear is the only drawback to Fortune!'

'And I am fearless, good Comnenus! I thank you for reading the Future to me. Believe me, I will not fail to follow your advice. And now, will you come and sup with me? Gerald Pauncefort, Regnier d'Arcy, and several of our friends, will join us.'

'I grieve that I cannot be of your party, my lord,' said the Greek; 'but I have much to occupy me this evening, and at all times am little fitted to be one of a gay company. You will, I hope, excuse me.'

'As you will,' replied Count Robert; 'though should you feel inclined to join us, it will greatly rejoice me; but use your own pleasure. Farewell, noble Greek.'

He left the tent. Paul Comnenus watched till he was at some distance, then raising the curtain which divided it into a sleeping and sitting apartment, released a tall Arab from his temporary hiding-place. They exchanged meaning smiles, as the Oriental placed himself on the low seat which the prince had just before occupied.

'Have I done well, noble Ceciddam?' asked Comnenus.

'Wisely as the Sultan Solomon himself,' said the Saracen, 'and craftily as Zatani. Thy headstrong dupe will, doubtless, throw the whole army into confusion by his brain-sick valour. Now for the promised plan of the battle.'

The Greek began, in a low voice, to relate to his attentive



listener all that he had gathered of the decisions of the council. The Saracen recorded much of what he heard on his jewelled tablets, and then, drawing forth a purse, presented it to the traitor.

'The soldiers placed to dispute the landing of these Franks,' he said, 'shall be chosen from those most timid and subject to panic terrors of our troops; they will fly at the first onset, and the pursuit will divide and separate this mighty host. Thou hast well earned thy reward! Yet tell me, Christian, is it solely for love of the yellow gold thou hast betrayed thy brethren?'

There was scorn on the Arab's handsome lip as he spoke, which stung the false Greek to the soul.

'Moslem!' he said, sternly, 'I hate the Latins as much as they detest the Infidels. They have deprived me of my birth-right—have ever insulted, and (when they could) oppressed my nation. Moreover, an Englishman, by aid and connivance of Robert of France, hath robbed me of my only and beloved child!'

'By Allah!' said the Saracen, 'I marvel no longer at your deep hatred of them. And now farewell, Christian!'

'Stay, noble Ceciddam—my safe-conduct to Damietta?'

'Is here. Should our scheme fail, you will not need it. If it succeed—which our holy Prophet grant it may—you will find it of no small service.'

Throwing a large dark mantle round him, the Saracen left the hut by a back outlet which sloped to the river, and Paul Cornenus, turning to the table on which his guest had deposited the wages of his treason, rapidly opened it, and counted the yellow gold.

'I am rich now—very rich,' he said, with glittering eyes; 'this will restore my lost station, my former luxury; nay, will purchase absolution for my sins! All-powerful gold! with thee will I

visit Venice, that sea-queen of splendour and honour ; and if I find no other path open to my ambition, I will endow a monastery, and reign *there!* For have I not talents greater than my wealth? and the *Triple Crown* itself is not unattainable to the two conjoined! *Pope Paul Comnenus!* What matters the difference between the Churches? I could conform to their Western fantasies, and be a very orthodox Latin prelate!’

He laughed scornfully as he carefully secured his treasure, and then re-seated himself before his manuscripts.

The morrow morning dawned, and with its earliest light the host that followed the Oriflamme was in motion. It drew up for a moment on the banks of the calm and sullen-looking river ere the word was given to advance ; the Arab, mounted behind a man-at-arms, waited to point out the ford. It was a gallant array that Pauncefort gazed on, as, with the same mournful foreboding, he glanced, during that brief interval, along their glittering ranks : the redoubtable knights of the Temple on their splendid chargers ; the flower of the French chivalry, amongst whom were mingled the brave and sturdy lances of England ; the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem ; the troops of Burgundy and Flanders ; and the division which encircled and were commanded by Louis of France in person, surrounded by a group of princely vassals. Old Nile had seen nothing like that gallant army since its shores were trodden by the Roman legions, and as the warriors plunged into the dark waters, their shouts—the mingled war-cries of many valiant nations—struck terror into the hearts of the three hundred Moslems who, drawn up in battle array, waited on the opposite shore to dispute their landing. The panic fear had not subsided ere the division of Prince Robert, pressing wildly onwards, gained the land, and then, without a blow—without a single effort to defend them—

selves—the Saracens wildly fled. Shouting his war-cry, the rash young Count pursued them at headlong speed, whilst the Templars, who had struggled on shore immediately afterwards, enraged to see themselves supplanted in the post of honour, spurred hotly after, making the clear and still air of morning resound with their cry of 'Beuséant for the Temple!' In the general press onwards, order was lost, and with it the success of the Christian army. For a time, nevertheless, the mad valour of Count Robert appeared to carry all before it: believing that the remainder of the united army was in view, and infected with the panic of the flying cravens, who bore them the intelligence, the garrison of Massoura opened its gates.

'The town is ours!' shouted the prince, as he paused to allow the two Grand Masters to approach him. 'On, knights and nobles! On, priestly warriors! Let us plant the Cross on these vanquished cowards' walls ere his Grace join us.'

He was dashing onwards, when the Knight of Leighton laid a firm grasp on his rein.

'Pause, I implore, I beseech you, royal Robert,' he exclaimed; 'there is stratagem in this instant surrender. These infidels are full of guile, like him they worship. Tarry, I beseech you, and take counsel with the brave William de Sonnac, or with our gallant Salisbury!'

A frown gathered on the flushed brow of the haughty young Count, but with a peevish 'Psha!' he yielded, and curbed his impatient charger till the Grand Masters and the Earl were beside him. Displeased at the disobedience to the council's decision, and the brain-sick valour which the prince had displayed, they listened in haughty silence to his eager proposition that they should enter and take possession of the town, and gave it a decided negative.

'For many a long year, my Lord of Artois, have I fought against the Moslem,' said the veteran De Sonnac, 'and have found them subject to such sudden panics as you have now witnessed ; but their wild fear subsides as suddenly. No sooner shall they perceive the few lances opposed to their swarming hosts, by our separation from the main body, than they will rally ; and King Louis may arrive too late to rescue us from certain destruction.'

The dark flush on the brow of the proudest prince of Christendom deepened at this opposition to his will.

'I marvel not,' he said, with bitter scorn, 'I marvel not that the most reverend brethren of the Temple and the Hospital are accused of favouring the Infidel! Such cold counsel comes well from those who drain the West of blood and gold, not that the Cross may triumph, but that their Orders, may flourish!—from those who love the Crescent, and dread the termination of a war which may give them a Western ruler. Who knows not how the Emperor Frederick's life was perilled by your wiles?'

'Think you, great prince,' was the Hospitaller's indignant answer, 'that we have left our native land, our fathers' heritages, and the world's pleasures, for a life of constant warfare, that we may betray the Church of Christ, and peril our worldly honour and immortal souls? Shame on the foul suspicion! unworthy alike of a knight and of a Christian.'

The Count d'Artois' hand was on his sword, and his eyes flashed with ungovernable fury, as he moved towards the speaker ; but the veteran Templar pressed between.

'Shame on these divisions, which give us an easy prey to the Infidel!' he exclaimed ; 'let death redeem our insulted honour. Beauséant for the Temple! Forward, to death, my brethren!'

Every soldier of the Red Cross re-echoed that war-cry, and

the Hospitallers answered with a similar shout of defiance. The English lances alone remained indignantly silent. Their leader moved forward.

'Sir Count,' said the brave Plantaganet, boldly, 'in our England 't is ever the wisest head that leads, and the bravest men are ready then to work their leader's will without gainsaying. Our islanders are deemed rude and unmannerly; but, by St. George, there lives not the English yeoman who would not think it foul shame to treat with discourtesy so brave and experienced a leader as William de Sonnac.'

The long-smothered jealousy which Cicely Fitzwalter's idle words on their journey had originally awakened, the galling because just rebuke he had received, roused the irritable Artois to frenzy. Alluding to a current belief of the period, that, as a divine judgment for Becket's murder, the English had been reduced to the condition of apes, he exclaimed furiously,

'Behold the courage of these cravens who wear tails! Happy would it be for the army of the Cross, were we quit of them!'

Drawing up his stately form, the English nobleman answered with a majestic scorn,

'Lord Count, I will go to-day so far into the Moslem ranks, that you shall not dare keep at the tail of my *destrier*.'

He spurred his charger as he spoke, and shouting 'St. George!' rushed with his lances into Massoura. The Templars and knights of St. John followed; and, mad with anger, the headstrong Robert continued the pursuit, passing through the city, and drawing bridle only on the plains of Babylon, which were strewn with the bodies of the slain fugitives.

Weary of warring thus on panic-stricken cowards, the Count d'Artois was about to return to Massoura, when suddenly the

Saracen *atabal* sounded a point of war. The place of Moslem leader now belonged to a brave and skilful soldier, who well knew how to avail himself of the disorder of the French, scattered as they were on all sides of the plain, and exhausted by their hot pursuit. Shouting in turn *their* cry of '*Allah Hu!*' the rallying Infidels rushed on their lately victorious foe. In vain the prince endeavoured to collect and form his followers; beaten on all sides, they retreated in disorder to Massoura, bearing him with them, in an agony of shame, anger, and remorse.

The Emir who had thus saved his country followed up his advantage by immediately investing the city, and throwing a body of troops between it and the advancing squadrons of the King; whilst in their supposed city of refuge, the unhappy Artois and his gallant comrades found themselves obliged to maintain a desperate struggle for life, as unavailing as it was brief. Scarcely had they entered the streets before showers of missiles fell on them from every window; every opening poured forth swarms of dusky warriors, who, thirsty for revenge for their slain brethren, hewed down the Christian knights like ripe corn — themselves in comparative security. By the exertion of the most reckless valour, the Count d'Artois made his way to the principal square of Massoura, where, unhorsed and wounded, the Earl of Salisbury fought like a lion at bay beside his wounded and slain islanders; and, bleeding and well-nigh exhausted, Pauncefort parried and received many a blow intended for the bold leader beneath whose pennon he fought. The eyes of the friends met, and in the silent reproof of that gaze, as it wandered from him to the heaps of slain, whose deaths had been caused by his rash folly, Robert of Artois read both compassion and reproach. Stung to the soul, he cried

in a tone of anguish, 'Fly, fly, brave Englishmen! God fights against us!'

'Now, God forbid,' answered the stout Earl, in a voice clear and cheerful as was ever its wont; 'God forbid that my father's son should flee from the face of a Saracen.'

And again shouting his war-cry, he rushed into the thickening throng of foes, and fell on a pile of slain enemies. As the crest of the brave Plantagenet sank, Robert of Artois groaned heavily, and, turning, beheld his English friend beside him.

'Art thou here, Pauncefort?' he said. 'It is well! I would ask your pardon for to-day's rash insult to your nation, ere I atone for it with my blood.'

The Knight of Leighton replied by pressing the mailed fingers of the prince in his own, and they rushed again forward, side by side. But heavier still grew the pressure of the increasing multitude, and, faint—weary—bleeding—the blows of the French prince fell more feebly on the foe: twice he owed his life to his brave comrade, but it was redeemed from death only for a moment; for, overcome by exhaustion and loss of blood, the young Count soon after sank down to rise no more. Pauncefort had only time to meet his dying glance of farewell with one of agonized sorrow, and to refuse indignantly the flight to which his last gesture urged him, ere a gigantic Saracen, whose garb and bearing proclaimed him a leader of his people, stood opposed to him. The strife in which he was now engaged might be considered almost a single combat, as the Saracens, perceiving that the young Englishman was alone and already severely wounded, left the honour of an easy victory to the aged chief, who had long been one of their most renowned champions. But the heroic Englishman kept him bravely at bay, till the trusty sword, which was already so

deeply dyed in Moslem blood, was shivered to fragments in his hand.

‘Yield thee, bold Nazarene!’ cried the Emir, in the *lingua-Franca* which was a common language in the East; ‘yield thee to the servant of the Prophet!’

‘Never!’ shouted the knight, springing forward, and seizing his antagonist with the grasp of an experienced wrestler—‘Never, whilst I breathe!’

The Chief, surprised at the suddenness of the action, was almost instantly thrown to the ground, and the fingers of his foe grasped his throat with a force that threatened suffocation. A hundred daggers waved instantly above them, aimed at the English warrior, when their leader shouted to them to forbear, and, rising from the slippery earth, disengaged himself from his insensible adversary, who had fainted from loss of blood.

‘God is great!’ said the Moslem, gravely, wiping the dust and blood from his brow. ‘Methought the Christian would have choked me in that bear’s hug. He is a warrior worthy to contend with the father of Ceciddam! Raise him, and bear him to my son’s house. The field is strewn with dead Nazarenes. Our holy Prophet hath given a great deliverance to his people!’

The Emir spoke truly. Death had that day reaped a full harvest of Europe’s bravest and noblest sons. Two princes of the house of France, the English Earl, the Count de la Marche, and many a knight and noble lay stark and stiff on the battle plain. The Grand Master of the Hospitallers was a captive; William de Sonnac, covered with wounds, cut his way through the Mameluke ranks to bear the fatal tidings to King Louis; and of the van of the brave array which had that morning crossed the Nile ford, only four knights of St. John, three



Templars, and three Teutonic knights escaped with life and freedom from the city. Without its walls the battle raged as fiercely between the advancing squadron (headed by Louis in person) and the Moslem Emir; sunset leaving the victory still doubtful. The Christian host encamped on the plains, breathing nought but vengeance for their slain brethren, and eager desire to retrieve their honour; but pestilence and famine came to give their demon aid to the Moslem, and the King of France, obliged to retreat, prostrated by disease, and deserted by all save his faithful knight, Sir Geoffrey de Sergines, was at length taken prisoner. Defeat and disgrace sat on the Christian banners. The dispersed army vainly endeavoured to regain Damietta by the Nile. Their vessels were wrecked on its banks, and they who escaped death in its waters met it from the swords of the Saracens. Everywhere the Cross sank beneath the victorious Crescent, and the crusade appeared ended by the fatal battle of Massoura.



## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## THE RANSOM DEMANDED.

Chi è questa, che vien, ch'ogni uom la mira,  
 E fa di clarità l'aer tremare  
 E mena seco Amor, sicchè parlare  
 Null' uom ne puote, ma ciascun sospira?

GUIDO CAVALCANTI.

**I**T was evening, and the mansion of the Saracen Emir, the father of Ceciddam (which stood close to the shores of

the river), was lighted up with many bright lamps, that glittered amongst the dark grove of date trees and acacias around it; attracting by their fairy-like splendour the gaze of many a boatman of the Nile as he floated past it. The father of the brave leader who had saved his native land by his victory over the invaders at Massoura, had returned from that city to rejoice in his own and his son's well-won glory. To an apartment of this Eastern palace we must now introduce the reader. It was a long and lofty chamber, hung with large mirrors, which reflected the light of a number of small silver lamps. Exquisite perfumes floated on the air, which was cooled by the play of a small fountain placed near the centre of the room, which was nearly cruciform. On the divan which surrounded the chamber reclined the majestic old Arab, and on a pile of rich silken cushions at his feet sat an Arab girl of rare beauty, glittering with gold and gems. Richly-dressed female slaves stood with arms meekly folded on their bosoms near their mistress, whose bright eyes were raised to her father's face with an expression of animated and child-like pleasure.

'Thou wilt let me see thy captives?' she exclaimed. 'Holy Allah! how I shall like to look upon the terrible warriors! Many a time has my old nurse Zara hushed me to sleep with stories of their fearful Melech Ric. Is it true, O Emir, that they feed on the flesh of men? I remember Zara told me that the Melech Ric loved no food so well as a slain Saracen. The foul ghoul!'

She shuddered as she spoke.

'Nay, my daughter, credit not thy nurse's fables. These Franks know better than to feed on dead carrion. They are bold warriors, my Zobeide, and were they true believers, would be worthy to rule over brave men. Their Sultan is a second

Saladin for patience, nobleness, and courage, as he hath shown since he has been captive.'

'And wilt thou take ransom for these brave Franks?' asked Zobeide.

'Ay, on the condition I told thee. The fame of thy brother's deeds rivals already the renown of the great Soldan, and I will that the fame of my daughter's beauty be also known in the far West as it is already in the East. But drop thy veil till I bid thee raise it, damsel; the Christian comes.'

A firm, proud step was heard without, and almost immediately after a Christian knight was ushered into the chamber. Pale from suffering, confinement, and anxiety, Edmund Fitzwalter was still of so striking and noble an appearance, that the Arab girl involuntarily started, and murmured in her own tongue an exclamation of admiration and surprise. Slightly recognizing his captor, the Englishman bowed low to the veiled lady.

'Nazarene,' said the Emir, with grave dignity, 'I told you that to-night should decide your ransom. Your fantastic Western chivalry hold it an insult to be lightly valued. Five hundred gold bezants—on the fulfilment of a certain condition—shall ransom one of the bravest of your Sultan's warriors.'

'Name your condition, Saracen,' said the knight: 'the sum you demand will be cheerfully paid by my noble kinsman at Damietta.'

'Look on the face of Ceciddam's sister,' was the reply. He raised Zobeide as he spoke, and threw back her veil, and Fitzwalter gazed with undisguised admiration on the dark Eastern beauty, who timidly, and with childlike curiosity, raised her eyes to his face; a smile, half-bashful, half-playful, parting her rosy lips, and showing her dazzling teeth.

'To look on such loveliness, beautiful lady,' he said, address-

sing her in the *lingua-Franca* in which he had been conversing with her father, 'is to desire thralldom, and remain a willing slave.'

'Hear, now, my condition, Christian,' said the Emir, who had marked his wondering admiration with exulting pride: 'Wherever the vain chivalry of Christendom do deeds of arms in honour of their ladies—as is their custom—thou shalt assert that the sister of Ceciddam, the Lady Zobeide, excels all the beauties of the world, and do battle in her behalf.'

Fitzwalter hesitated for a moment, then answered with a slight smile, 'I embrace the condition, and am the lady's devoted champion in tilt and tourney for the future. Vouchsafe, madam,' he continued, bending one knee gracefully before the Eastern princess, 'vouchsafe to honour your knight with some token, which he will defend with his life.'

'Wear this chain, valiant Christian,' replied the young Arab, blushing deeply, as she presented him with her rich gift; 'and may the holy Prophet give success to your arms—save when you turn them against his chosen people.'

'Thou hast well said, my daughter,' said the Emir: 'Allah hath given thee the words of understanding, as well as the gift of outward comeliness. Thou shalt return to Damietta tomorrow, Sir Knight, and my followers, who will escort thee thither, shall bring back thy ransom.'

Fitzwalter bowed, and was again about to address the Arab lady, when the Emir motioned to him to step aside, and desired the slaves who tarried at the door to admit the other captive. Edmund started as Gerald Pauncefort, still too weak to walk without support, entered the apartment, and advanced towards the Emir, leaning on the arm of his faithful squire, who had shared his captivity. The Christian knights exchanged glances

of glad recognition, and Pauncefort, after a slight and courteous obeisance to the lady, addressed his captor.

'Sir Emir,' he said, 'you have desired my presence here, to name my ransom. At what sum may I purchase freedom?'

'Five hundred gold bezants will ransom your fellow-Christian, brave Nazarene,' replied the chief; 'a hundred more is only a meet price for his liberty who has had his hand on Bendocdar's throat, and was nearly a match for him after a day's hard fighting. But first cast thine eyes on this damsel, and tell me if they ever beheld her equal.'

Amazed at so singular a command, Pauncefort involuntarily obeyed, saying immediately, as he marked the deep blush and downcast eyes of the maiden,

'I pray you pardon my discourteous gaze, noble damsel, if it hath displeased you.'

The tone of kindly courtesy in which he spoke won a sweet smile from Zobeide, who beheld the second Christian presented to her with an interest and emotion Fitzwalter had not excited. From the marvellous relations of his valiant deeds with which her attendants had amused her leisure, she was, woman-like, desirous of his notice—anxious that he should admire her; and she almost trembled as she waited his answer to her father's words.

'Now, Christian, mark me! I will accept no ransom from thee, unless thou pledge me also thy knightly faith, that in the warlike games of thy Western brethren, thou wilt assert, with thy good lance and sword, that this maiden hath no equal amongst the women of the Franks.'

The English knight's countenance expressed, at first, unmixed surprise, and then a flush of anger mounted to his brow.

'Thy daughter, Saracen,' he said, 'is a beauteous maiden,

and may well be esteemed the flower of your Eastern clime ; but it befits not a Christian knight to lay lance in rest, save for the honour of a Christian lady ; nor can I in truth assert that she equals—beauteous though she be—the lady of my love.’

The Arab’s brow grew dark with anger.

‘Nay, then,’ he said, in a tone of suppressed rage, ‘my daughter scorns thy championship, seeing she hath already as brave a warrior to win glory for her charms. But hear me, Nazarene : thou leavest not thy prison, unless thou consent to maintain, at tilt and tourney, that the women of my people generally are superior to the pale-faced daughters of the West.’

‘Thinkest thou,’ answered the captive, scornfully, ‘that the knight lives who would thus insult the lights of chivalry—the matchless wives and daughters of our Europe—by ranking them beneath thy harem slaves ? Saracen, thou ravest !’

‘Dog of a misbeliever !’ exclaimed the enraged chief, ‘dost thou beard me thus ? Nay, then, by Allah ! I will take no ransom for thee, save *one* which shall put thy boasted beauties to the test. Either she whom thou lovest SHALL RANSOM THEE WITH HER OWN WHITE HAND, or thou shalt wither out thy prime of manhood in a dungeon.’

Horror and indignation kept the knight for a moment silent. At length, breathing deeply, he turned towards the slave who had brought him there, saying calmly, ‘Lead me to my prison.’

‘The Christian knows full well,’ said the Arab, bitterly, ‘that his boasted beauty would not sacrifice a curl of her fair hair for him.’

‘I tell thee, Saracen,’ answered Gerald, sternly, ‘that the gentle lady thou dost belie would give her life cheerfully for those she loves. But never shall she know the horrid price thou settest upon my freedom. Life and liberty were too

dearly purchased by one drop of her blood! I am thy captive for ever.'

'Nay, but I would fain try the constancy of this paragon, and punish thy insolence through her. Come hither, boy: wilt thou bear a message faithfully to this Frank damsel?'

Reginald de Tracy approached the Emir with a proud step.

'Give me my liberty,' he said, 'and perchance I will do thy bidding.'

'Thou art bold, young Nazarene. Yet I will give thee freedom, on condition that thou hie straight to yonder infidel's love, and tell her what thou hast seen and heard but now. If thou returnest before a year hath passed away, and bringest me the white hand of the lady, thy lord shall go free; but if thou comest not, I swear, by Allah, he shall then die the death of a slave.'

'De Tracy,' cried Pauncefort, with much emotion, 'I command thee, bear no such message to my lady——'

'Peace, Christian!' interrupted the Emir. 'And thou, Sir Squire—wilt thou do my bidding?'

'I will,' replied Reginald de Tracy, firmly, 'because I deem that my sweet Lady Constance had far better sacrifice her hand than her life's happiness; and moreover, I would that thy Paynim people should know the noble nature of the dames of Christendom. Yet mark me, base Saracen, this thy cruelty shall brand thy name with infamy for many a generation.'

The scimitar of the Arab flashed in his hand, but with a piercing shriek Zobeide threw herself between the youth and her father.

'Spare him, spare him!' she cried. 'Oh, my father, slay not the unarmed youth in mine own chamber. Father, if thou lovest me, harm him not!'

The flashing eye of her sire softened as he looked on his kneeling child.

‘For thy sake I spare him, my Peri,’ he said; ‘the dwelling of thy pure loveliness shall not be polluted by infidel blood. Away, dog of a Frank! Be ready by the morrow’s dawn to do my bidding, or thou diest.’

Pauncefort would have again spoken, but the Emir motioned him impatiently to leave the chamber, and the attendant slaves hurried him forcibly away.

‘Go thou also, Sir Knight,’ added Bendocdar to Edmund: ‘to-morrow a party of my people shall escort thee to Damietta, in company with yon braggart boy; and by them shalt thou send thy ransom. Go, and remember thou art the sworn champion of Zobeide and the women of her people.’

The knight, with a graceful obeisance to the damsel, withdrew, and as he followed the slave to his prison chamber, a smile of scorn curled his lip.

‘The vain, hot-headed fool!’ he thought, as his mind dwelt on the scene he had just witnessed; ‘why could he not have accepted the condition? Who would heed a vow made to a Saracen, or—a woman? Good faith! if all one’s oaths and protestations to the fair mischiefs were registered against us, the Church could scarce find absolutions sufficient for us! But his discourteous truth and stubborn honour shall not cost fair Constance de Lingard a hand! Rather let him die in thralldom.’

Reginald de Tracy was that night conducted to a separate chamber from Pauncefort, to his infinite mortification, for he had intended justifying his intention of delivering the Arab’s message to Constance, to his offended master. He was, however, disappointed and alone; and, throwing himself on his couch, indulged in a reverie of his promised freedom. Already



the white cliffs of merry England were before him, and he fancied that he stood in his own home, amidst the sunny plains and green woods of his youth. He felt his mother's kiss upon his brow, and heard the greeting of his glad young sisters. How proudly swelled the boy's heart, as he thought of the importance he should possess, as a crusader—as a visitant of that strange land of which so many wild tales were told by pilgrims, who had, probably, seen less of it than he had. He was gradually sinking into slumber, as he thus built his airy castles, when the glimmer of a light roused him, and, springing from his pallet, he beheld the door slowly open, and the chief's daughter, followed by an attendant, stood before him. She held a small silver lamp in her hand, which flashed upon her costly gems and golden-bound tresses. Her veil was raised, and as the squire—still only half-awake—gazed on her beautiful face and rich attire, he sank involuntarily on his knee, and, in faltering accents, inquired her pleasure with him.

'Rise, young Christian,' said the damsel, haughtily. 'I come to you at this unusual—it may be, unseemly—hour, because I dare not further cross my sire in his wrath; and yet I would not that yonder stern and stately knight should deem so basely of the maidens of my land, as to think that I shared the anger which his scorn awoke in the Emir. I seek no champion amongst the Franks: I would not that they even hear the name of Zobeide.' She paused proudly, and a deep flush crimsoned her cheek.

'Tell him,' she added, after a brief silence, for Reginald knew not how to answer her—'ay, and tell the lady also—that the Arab girl has knelt, and wept, and prayed, at her father's feet—for the first time in vain! I cannot doubt that she whom the Christian loves will send the Ransom, for surely he is worthy

of it; and it may comfort her to know that, till that Ransom comes, there is one who will watch over the life of the captive, and defend it, if need be, with her own. Tell her this, Sir Squire, and bear her from Zobeide this token.'

She presented to him, as she spoke, a chaplet of Oriental pearls. He took it reverently, and promised faithfully to do her behest.

'I doubt thee not,' said the damsel; 'he who dares *speak* truly at all hazards, will *act* truly. And to speed thee on thy journey, accept these gifts.'

She took from her attendant a sword, the hilt of which was inlaid with diamonds, and a heavy purse; then without waiting to hear half the thanks of the squire, turned and left the apartment.

'Oh! most gentle Pagan, most bounteous and beautiful daughter of darkness,' exclaimed the boy Reginald, as he gazed in the light of morning on the Saracen lady's costly presents; 'there is no knight in King Louis's army who possesses such a sword as the poor squire, now; and the purse is full of sequins! Now, blessed be my captivity, for it has made me rich enough to build up again my father's dwelling-place, and comfort the age of my widowed mother! But I must hide my treasures, or I may chance to see them depart like fairy gold, ere I reach England.'

An hour after this soliloquy the squire was riding beside Sir Edmund Fitzwalter, escorted by a large body of Saracens, towards Damietta.

'Thou art bound on a strange errand, De Tracy,' said Edmund, familiarly addressing the favourite squire of his former comrade; 'thou wilt never have the barbarity to tell the fair Constance de Lingard of the ransom demanded?'

'Ay, but I will, Sir Knight,' was the reply, 'and win her thanks for so doing. Have I not long known that sweet Lady Constance loved my lord better than her own life—ay, even when she never hoped to be his bride? And it is better to bear a bodily wound than that of the heart, I trow.'

'How knowest thou that she loves Sir Gerald, boy?' asked Fitzwalter, hastily. 'She was first betrothed to his brother, and her choice was never asked when the old dying knight transferred her hand to his youngest-born.'

'But she had only a sisterly affection for Sir Edward—albeit, I think he was the goodlier knight, and the better horseman of the twain. I was a page at Leighton then, as you may remember, and I saw much more than ever I told: right sure am I, by many a token, that she always loved Sir Gerald.'

'Doubtless, you were a shrewd and most intelligent observer!' said Edmund, ironically. 'Nevertheless, you will allow me to doubt the justice of your pageship's suspicions. I will not believe the lady loves Pauncefort, although her high sense of duty might lead her to any sacrifice. You cannot think, De Tracy, since you are so arch an observer, that your lord merits such a ransom?'

The squire looked somewhat disconcerted.

'I understand you, Sir Knight,' he said; 'but if all met with no more love or kindness than they deserve, this world would be but a sorry place, to my thinking. If Lady Constance de Lingard give my master his freedom from the Saracens, I know him well enough to stake my honour that he is *her* captive for life.'

'Tush, foolish boy! gratitude may be at our command, not love—it cannot be bought even with blood—and Gerald Pauncefort loves my cousin Cicely.'

‘Gratitude, and esteem, and honour, are very good substitutes for love, nevertheless, Sir Knight, and may suffice one as gentle and as dutiful as the damsel of whom we speak; albeit, they might not satisfy some more imperious dames.’

‘Then you will suffer the Lady Constance to ransom with her own blood, one who has been devoted to another during the whole crusade—keeping her ignorant of his wavering faith? *That* were dishonourable, De Tracy.’

‘I think not so, an it like your knightship,’ was the calm reply, ‘seeing I do but follow the example of Providence.’

‘The example of Providence! What mean you, boy?’

‘Only, that as Providence kindly forbids our seeing what passes in more places than one, I have no right to lift the veil. Indeed, I should hold it as black a sin to do so, as to look into the magic mirrors which men say these Saracen worshippers of the devil possess, in which one may behold the employment of one’s absent friend when one will; and little as I have seen of the world, I should deem it both an unprofitable and displeasing sight in most cases.’

‘Thou art shrewd-witted, Sir Squire, although thy judgment be somewhat shallow. Thou wouldst not conceal the truth, if the lady questioned thee?’

‘Of course not,’ answered Reginald, with a heightened colour. ‘But she will not. It is only the false-hearted who suspect the fidelity of others.’

The knight was silent, and they discussed the subject no more during the remainder of their journey. Both the travellers proceeded immediately on their arrival to the house of the Baron Fitzwalter, where they found two or three of the other knights who had escaped from the fatal town of Massoura. They were greeted as arrivals from the dead, and the English leader cheer-

fully advanced his kinsman's ransom, which the Saracen escort waited without the walls to receive. After learning the captivity of the King, and the negotiations which were begun for his release, Edmund left the Baron, and proceeded to the palace of Queen Marguerite. He was ushered into the royal presence, and beheld the fair Provençal princess, robed in mourning garments, so pale, and sad, and changed, that he started in painful surprise. By her knee stood a fair boy, in his earliest childhood, who was striving to cheer and encourage his mother and her circle of weeping ladies, by promises of defending them against the Saracens. As the ransomed knight knelt and kissed the Queen's hand, she asked him eagerly of the news in the Infidels' camp.

'I know of none, madam,' he answered, 'having heard nought in my prison. But affairs of great moment call me instantly to England, and I would not leave Egypt without proffering my homage to your Grace.'

'Alas! alas!' said Marguerite, sorrowfully; 'will you leave us, Sir Edmund Fitzwalter? We need every knight's protection at a time when we hourly expect the Saracens at our gates.'

'Be of better cheer, royal lady,' replied Edmund. 'Did I think Damietta in danger of an assault, nothing should induce me to leave your Grace, little as my single arm might avail you; but rely on it, madam, no attempt will be made on the city—the Saracens are but too sure of regaining it without bloodshed, and they are quite ignorant of the true number of its garrison.'

'Thank Heaven and our Lady for it,' exclaimed the Queen. 'I would I had the bold spirit of my mother the Queen Regent—but in very truth I am cowardly as any simple village maiden. Were you near the Count d'Artois when he fell, Sir Knight?'

'I was not, madam; but I heard that his death was worthy

of his royal birth. I have been a fellow-captive with his friend Sir Gerald Pauncefort.'

'Ah! the English knight who saved his life in Cyprus! I am certain my royal lord, King Louis, will ransom him, if ransom will be taken, for the love of his dead brother.'

'I grieve to tell your Grace it would be impossible. He has rashly shocked the prejudices of his captor, and the Arab will take no ransom save the white hand of the knight's lady-love.'

'Out upon the savage!' exclaimed Marguerite. 'But this touches nearly the Lady Cicely Fitzwalter, doth it not? Methought the knight was a favoured servant of the damsel's.'

Edmund smiled.

'Your Grace had good cause to think it,' he said, 'judging by the devotion of the gallant; but it was not so—Sir Gerald Pauncefort is betrothed to a maiden in England, and his confidential esquire is now in Damietta, bound to his own country to obtain the Ransom.'

An exclamation of horror and surprise escaped the ladies, and 'the false knight!' 'the inhuman monster!' was echoed round the circle. An exulting smile played on the lip of Fitzwalter, as, rising, he respectfully asked permission to bid his cousin Cicely adieu.

'Our page shall guide you to her apartment, Sir Edmund,' said the Queen, graciously. 'The poor girl has been ill ever since she heard of the death of the Count d'Artois and the disappearance of this unhappy knight: your presence, I hope, will cheer her.'

Fitzwalter bowed, and followed his little guide to a chamber, in which he found his fair kinswoman. She looked beautiful as ever, but there was a fever-spot on her cheek, and a wild, restless brightness in her dark eyes. As soon as she saw her

cousin she sprang from her seat, and with a low scream of surprise threw herself into his arms.

'Edmund,' she said, as he embraced her, 'I never thought to look on you again!'

'Yet I am here, fair lady,' he answered, gaily; 'escaped from captive thrall, to serve you with my good lance and sword.'

'Sit down by me, good cousin,' said the maiden, 'and tell me hast thou any tidings of the—the—Knight of Leighton?'

'I have, Cicely. He lives!'

She clasped her hands in speechless joy.

'But he is a captive.' And fully and truly he narrated to his cousin the scenes he had witnessed in the Emir's palace. She listened with exulting pride.

'Ay, it was of me he thought, Edmund, when he said he would die rather than insult the women of his country; and yet this hero, this true-hearted, high-souled warrior, is the destined husband of another. It must not, it shall not be!'

'Will you ransom him, Cicely?' asked Fitzwalter, eagerly. 'He were then your own for ever.'

The lady looked at her small white hand, and shuddered.

'All the saints forbid,' she exclaimed; 'you make my blood run cold at the very thought, Edmund! And besides, it would be useless; Gerald would still be pledged to Constance. No, no, good cousin, let his esquire go to England for the *betrothed's* hand. If she deny it, she must in honour set him free from his engagement; and if she give it—why, there is danger in severing so many veins and arteries, and she may have delivered him for *me!*'

Edmund regarded her with an expression of disgust.

'So be it then, Cicely; but I also am going to England. Have you no commissions for me?'

‘None, cousin mine, only I wish thee success in all thy schemes, and I know thee well enough to be sure they are many.’

The knight kissed her hand and withdrew; and after a few moments’ reflection, Cicely arose, and summoned one of her women.

‘I would speak,’ she said, ‘with Ismaël, the Arab leech. Bid him come hither.’

During the time the maiden waited for the practitioner, she paced her chamber with an uncertain and irregular step—her cheek pale, and her lips slightly compressed; but when the swarthy Arab stood before her, and made his low and graceful obeisance, she recovered her self-possession, and commanded him by a haughty gesture to approach.

‘Paynim,’ she said, ‘at thy need I succoured thee, and thou hast fed at my cost, and been sheltered beneath the roof of my father, the Lord Fitzwalter, from the day King Louis’s army entered Damietta. Wilt thou, in return, do my behest?’

‘Speak, lady—to hear is to obey.’

‘Thou art a cunning leech, good Ismaël, and knowest, doubtless, many a profound secret of nature. Hast thou no unguent which, applied to a wound, might render a second dressing unnecessary?’

‘I have, lady, of many sorts; some quick, others slow, in their operation; for the wisdom of the great Solomon is not wholly lost, seeing that many of his secrets touching the property of herbs and flowers still exist amongst my people.’

‘I doubt not thy skill,’ said the lady. ‘Hear me. I would fain have such an ointment which, applied to a fresh wound, may kill slowly, making death appear as the natural consequence of the injury. Canst thou pleasure me in this matter?’



'Lady, I can ; but for the power I give thee to destroy life, what shall be the reward of the physician's skill?'

'Thy freedom.'

'T is a mighty boon,' said the Arab, 'and for it I will do thy bidding. Allah has written on each mortal's forehead his appointed hour of doom, and unless it be His will we cannot break into the house of life. Nevertheless, I will give thee a drug, lady, mortal as the pestilence, and sweet as the flowers of Paradise.'

Half an hour after, Cicely Fitzwalter held in her hand a small silver box full of ointment of a rare and delicious perfume, for which the leech received a golden recompence, and permission to leave Damietta ; and then the lady dispatched a trusty servant to summon Reginald de Tracy to her presence. The squire obeyed in some surprise. With consummate art, the maiden's first questions were all of his imprisoned lord ; and when she spoke in terms of tender regret for the 'unhappy Constance de Lingard,' the shrewd youth believed that it was but to veil her more sincere interest in his master. As she spoke she opened the little box, and the strange rich odour floated on the air. The youth uttered an exclamation of delight.

'The perfume is very exquisite,' observed Cicely ; 'but this ointment possesses a better quality than its scent. Applied to a sword or any flesh-wound, it soothes the pain and induces sleep ; moreover, it heals sooner than any other unguent.'

'I would I had the treasures of the East at my command, lady,' said the squire, 'I would then bribe you to give me that box.'

'You shall not need them for such a purpose,' answered Cicely, with a gentle smile. 'If, as I imagine, you would have

it for your wounded lord, it is yours. Yet methought you told me but now his wounds were healed.' The latter words were added as Reginald eagerly grasped the box.

'They are, lady,' he answered; 'but take not back your gift, I beseech you! Should the poor Lady Constance be destined to suffer the amputation of her hand, think how much it might mitigate her sufferings.'

A slight frown dwelt for a moment on the fair brow of Cicely Fitzwalter.

'Thou mayest keep the box,' she said, with well-feigned reluctance, 'for thyself. I know not the Lady Constance save by report, and may not send a gift to a stranger.'

'And you have benefited her against your will, proud lady,' thought Reginald, as, with many professions of gratitude, he took leave of the beautiful Cicely, and sought his own quarters.

The next day a vessel was in readiness to sail, and Reginald found he was to have the company of Sir Edmund Fitzwalter in it to England. He was somewhat surprised, but the knight was familiar and even gay, and De Tracy felt flattered by his notice and amused by his conversation. By sunset the low shores they left lay far behind them, and before them the unbounded expanse of the sea. Reginald de Tracy's young heart leaped with joy as he marked each receding wave, and remembered that it bore him nearer and nearer to his English home.



## CHAPTER XXXV.

## THE PILGRIM.

*He* wooed a bright and burning star—  
*Thine* was the void, the gloom,  
 The straining eye that follow'd far  
 His fast-receding plume ;  
 The heart-sick listening while his steed  
 Sent echoes on the breeze ;  
 The pang—but when did *Fame* take heed  
 Of griefs obscure as these ?

MRS. HEMANS.

**W**E have for some time lost sight of Constance de Leighton. In truth, the life of woman—when of the character and in the position which best befit her sex—offers but little matter for the records of truth or fiction. The quiet fulfilment of domestic duties—the secret almsgiving—the holy prayers—the woman's work at the gay tapestry-frame—the thought of constant and patient affection lingering ever with the absent, had occupied the time of the maiden of Leighton during the interval which had elapsed since the knight's departure.

The summer flowers had bloomed and faded, the golden-tinted autumn waned, and again the snows of winter hung on the leafless boughs of the beech trees of Leighton Manor. For although it was New Year's Day (the year then began on the first of March), the cold was as severe as it had been at Christmas, and the sharp and howling winds appeared little disposed to allow the 'violet to take them with its beauty ;' but the old Hall was cheered by a blazing hearth, that set the blustering and ungenial weather at defiance, and its light flickered on a group

of the poorest and most aged of the tenantry of Leighton, assembled there to receive from the hands of the Lady Constance the dole of warm clothing it was usual at that season to bestow.

Constance stood amongst the creatures who were constantly nourished by her bounty like a sweet ministering spirit, and distributed her gifts with a kindly grace that doubled their value. And on the part of those who received them there was a warmth of gratitude, a reverential 'looking to the hands of their mistress,' which we who live in these days of poor laws, paupers, and unions, can scarcely picture to ourselves. Whilst she was thus engaged, the idiot Perrot had entered the hall unobserved, and now called to her through the throng,

'Lady Constance—Lady Constance!'

'Stand aside, and let the poor fool approach,' she said. 'And now, Giles, what would'st thou? But remember another time that it is unmannerly to call thus to your lady. Speak, boy.'

'I have brought you a guest! a brave guest, who can tell us news from Egypt, lady.'

With a start of pleasure the maiden turned, and beheld a palmer clad in a dark mantle, and carrying a withered palm-branch, standing a few paces from her.

'Hail, fair and noble damsel!' he said, in a low deep tone, which Constance fancied was strangely familiar to her ear; 'I come from the far Eastern clime, and would crave a night's hospitality, in return for which I can give you tidings of the army of the Cross.'

'We are rejoiced to greet you, holy pilgrim,' replied the lady; 'your presence and your tidings are alike welcome. Will it please you change your wet garments ere you join us at the supper board?'

'Nay, lady,' he replied, 'my pilgrim cloak is thick; I will

but shake the snow from it, and then thankfully accept a seat by your fireside, to warm my chilled frame till you require my company.'

'Be it as you will, holy sir ; I shall soon be at leisure to converse with you.' And hastily finishing her task, Constance hurried to tell the Lady Pauncefort the glad news that a stranger from the banks of the Nile waited below. As the palmer, who had crouched into the fireside, heard the proud step of the Dame Edith as she entered the hall, he drew the slouched hat further over his brows, but rose and greeted her with deep reverence.

'Your pardon, gracious lady,' he said, in a low, hoarse voice, 'for wearing my hat in your presence ; but I am under a vow to conceal myself from friends and strangers, till I have laid my palm-branch at the feet of our Lady of Walsingham.'

'The saints forbid you should be forsworn, holy palmer,' replied the Dame Pauncefort ; 'we are greatly honoured by your presence in our poor house. Draw to the board, I pray you ; or, if it like you better to eat apart, I will send your supper to you.'

'I accept with deep gratitude your last offer, lady, since it agrees with the tenor of my vow.'

Such vows were in accordance with the spirit of the age, and excited no surprise on the part of his hostess, who took her usual place at the board, and dispatched the seneschal with a well-laden trencher to their muffled and unsocial guest.

'You are straight from Egypt, holy pilgrim,' she said, after a short pause, during which the palmer ate his supper in silence. 'Was my son, Sir Gerald Pauncefort, when you left, with the army of the Cross ?'

'Ay, lady, and high in the favour of the royal Louis, having valiantly saved the life of his brother the brave Count d'Artois.'

‘And how looked he, Sir Palmer?’ asked Constance, eagerly; ‘was he well in health and spirits?’

‘No one better of the whole host, sweet maiden: men call him “the merry Englishman,” and if I may believe mine eyes, your gallant brother will bring a fair sister back to Leighton for you.’

Constance turned deadly pale, and the Dame Edith asked hastily,

‘How mean you, Sir Pilgrim? Your tale is impossible!’

‘It is true, believe me, madam. Sir Gerald Pauncefort is a worshipper at the shrine of the Western star of beauty—he lives but in the presence of the Lady Cicely Fitzwalter.’

‘Idle rumour, Sir Palmer, which may not gain credence with the near kindred of the brave knight thus belied! Sir Gerald is affianced to a lady so peerless and so gentle, that it needs not his plighted troth to assure her and his mother of his constancy.’

The pilgrim bowed meekly. ‘I may not gainsay you, lady; I thought to pleasure, not grieve you, by my tidings. Let my words, I pray you, be forgotten.’

There was a short, and, to Constance, a painful pause.

‘We heard that Damietta had offered no resistance to the crusaders,’ said the Lady Pauncefort; ‘was it true, good pilgrim?’

‘Ay, madam, the Saracens made but a show of resistance. A glorious sight it was to behold the glittering host of the misbelievers scattered by the unfurling alone of the sacred Oriflamme! Heaven fought then for King Louis.’

‘Is that dark sea, of which I have heard that nothing living grows near it—the Sea of the Curse—near Damietta?’ asked the Dame Edith.

‘No, lady, it is in Palestine, not Egypt. But they—the

people of the land—tell strange stories of their noble river the Nile, which they aver flows from the terrestrial Paradise. Its source, they say, is unapproachable, Allah having hidden it from the eyes of man.'

'Are they powerful sorcerers still, as they were in the time of Moses?' said Constance, endeavouring to turn her thoughts from the words she could *not* forget.

'Ay, sweet lady, they pretend to have inherited the magical arts of the great Solomon, whom they reverence equally with the Jews. And, in faith, I believe them. I was with the army of King Louis when encamped on the island in the Nile from which he crossed to Rexi, and myself beheld a great dragon of fire flying through the air, which alighted on the works erected to defend the soldiers employed on the causeway, and utterly consumed them.'

An exclamation of horror was uttered by his terrified auditors.

'Alas!' murmured the maiden, 'and Gerald is combating these fearful sorcerers! Our Lady keep and defend him!'

'There are many well known to me amongst the crusaders,' said the lady. 'Are the bold Salisbury and the good Baron Fitzwalter well?'

'They are, lady.'

'And the holy enterprise prospers? Think you that the Cross will be triumphant?'

'It is impossible to tell, madam. But if piety and valour could ensure success, King Louis might command it.'

He was again silent, and leaned against the back of the settle as if in pain or weary, and the lady, who feared to ask further respecting her son in Constance's presence, took advantage of his apparent fatigue to say,

'We are inhospitable to weary thee thus by our woman's

curiosity. Thou must be desirous of quiet and repose. Perchance to-morrow thou wilt beguile an hour or two with us in recounting the wonders of the kingdom of the Saracens.'

'That may not be, my kind and noble hostess: I must speed on my way with the morning's dawn; but I am not weary, and shall joyfully narrate the wonders I have seen to such fair and honourable listeners.'

'I thank you for your courtesy, good pilgrim. Let us draw round the hearth, holy father,' she added to the confessor, 'and listen to this worthy palmer's account of the strange lands in which our absent one wanders.'

The priest rose, and uttered the benediction for their late repast; then drawing their settles round the fire, the ladies, the confessor, and the domestics who hovered near, listened eagerly till a good hour after curfew to the marvellous tales of the pilgrim; many of which were true, others completely false, but all alike interesting to, and undoubted by, his auditors, who found a strange charm in the eloquence with which he related his wondrous legends.

Wild visions of Eastern splendour, and of fearful beings who ever appeared menacing the life of Gerald Pauncefort, haunted the pillow of Constance that night, and she awoke early the following morning with the feverish headache that follows disturbed slumbers. As soon as the sun rose and threw its rosy tints on the pure snow which still covered the lawn, the maiden, accustomed ever to seek comfort and support in the exercises of devotion, proceeded alone to the chapel to offer her morning orisons to Heaven. The small gothic building was situated, as we have said, about a quarter of a mile from the Hall, and the cold but bracing air cooled her heated brow as she walked rapidly towards it. And when she entered its sacred precincts,



the air of subdued and holy repose that it ever bore calmed and reassured her agitated spirit; but as she approached the altar she perceived that she was not alone; the dark-stoled pilgrim was a fellow-worshipper, at least in outward seeming. Constance would have preferred passing an hour of solitary self-communing in the sanctuary—*then* ever open to the worshipper; but as it was, she saw only in the palmer a holy man, whose devotions it was a privilege to share, and knelt meekly beside him. When her devotions were concluded she slowly rose, and the stranger instantly imitated her example, and following her from the church, gave her the usual morning salutation.

‘I am fortunate,’ he added, ‘in meeting the Lady Constance alone, as I have somewhat to impart which is for her private ear.’

The maiden looked surprised.

‘Does your secret relate in any way to Sir Gerald Pouncefort?’ she asked, timidly; ‘if not, I may not with propriety receive the confidence of a stranger.’

‘It does partly relate to him. But be seated on this fallen tree, lady: you tremble.’

‘T is with the cold, good pilgrim. Go on, I beseech you.’

‘I must first speak of myself, or my tale will be scarcely intelligible to you, lady. From my very earliest boyhood I loved a maiden who frequently shared my boyish pastimes, and by her surpassing gentleness could alone control a spirit so fierce and untameable that my nearest kindred shrank from the task of guiding or restraining it. I loved her in my childhood; as years advanced, my love became almost idolatry. I dwelt in the court of our foreigner-loving King; I beheld there the fairest of our own land, and the bright-eyed damsels of Provence, but not one of them could win a thought from my pure and

holy love. There is nothing in nature I can compare with her but the first early snowdrop.'

'I pray you speak to the point,' interrupted Constance: 'the dame may require me at the Hall, and I see not how this strange account of the charms of your lady can concern myself or the Knight of Leighton.'

'You err, lady; her fate was connected with his.' The maiden started, and fixed her soft blue eyes on him in painful suspense. 'And yet he loved her not—loves her not now, and is bound to her only by a tie that makes *his* misery—and mine. Constance, have you forgotten me? Can you forgive me for speaking the truth, painful though it be, ere too late?'

He threw off his large hat and the false locks mingled with grey which were attached to it, and seized her hands. The terrified girl immediately recognized him.

'Sir Edmund Fitzwalter!' she exclaimed, rising. 'What insolence is this? Unhand me, sir! How dare you insult me a second time with a tale of love? How dare you impeach the truth and honour of my betrothed?'

'By the crucifix above us—by the pure fame of my dead mother, Constance, I have spoken the truth! Gerald Pauncefort loves you not; he is bound to you only by the will of his dying father. I swear by all you hold sacred he loves my cousin Cicely!'

The hue of death spread over the fair face he gazed on as he spoke, but Constance struggled with her agony, and when she spoke, her voice was firm and calm.

'It may be as you say, Sir Knight,' she said; 'and if Gerald really love the Lady Cicely, Heaven forbid that Constance de Lingard should be an obstacle to his happiness! I can hie me to a convent, and free him by devoting myself to Heaven.'

She again endeavoured, though vainly, to release her hands.

'Hear me, Constance,' he exclaimed, fiercely: 'you shall not be doomed to a living grave! Be mine! I have loved you only too well—will ever hold you dearer than any other earthly good. Fly with me, and free your cold and faithless betrothed by becoming my wife, not by burying your loveliness in a cloister.'

'I know not what you have seen in my conduct to make you insult me by such a proposal,' said Constance, indignantly. 'Even if I were free, and sure of the approbation of her who has ever been a mother to my youth, my choice would not be the knight who sought to betray a confiding friend. Sir Edmund Fitzwalter, I know you, as one who sets at nought the laws of God and man, if they cross the path of his self-will: think you that I would dare the terrible fate that the wife of such a one may expect?'

'You are harsh, lady—ungenerous,' he said, with the most winning softness. 'It is true I erred, and but for you—my rebuking and preserving angel!—should have deeply sinned. But, Constance, it was the passion which I felt for you—the magic of your wondrous beauty—that tempted me even to dishonour. Is not the love that urged it an excuse for my error?'

She was silent.

'Speak to me,' he continued, with vehemence; 'tell me only that I may hope!'

'I will not so much deceive you,' she said. 'I should reject your proffered love under all circumstances; nor can I give implicit credence to your report of Gerald's inconstancy. He who could once deceive, may again; and you have given me good reason to doubt you, Sir Edmund.'

She spoke with a calm determination, that convinced her wooer neither prayers nor blandishment would avail. A frown,

so darkly terrible, gathered on his brow, that the maiden shuddered as she again struggled to escape from him; but he held her arm with a grasp of iron.

'Self-willed, perverse woman!' he exclaimed, in a tone of concentrated wrath, 'I will save thee in spite of thyself. Thou shalt *not* ransom him. I will conceal thee till the given time be passed——' And as he muttered these words, which were wholly unintelligible to his terrified companion, he drew her towards a path which led into the wood. She shrieked wildly, and at the same moment the false pilgrim felt his legs caught, and was nearly thrown off his balance. He loosened his hold of one of the lady's hands, and bent to free himself from the grasp of the idiot Perrot, who had approached unseen, and now, as he clung to Fitzwalter with his long bony arms, joined his piercing yells to the screams of Constance.

'The foul fiend take thee!' exclaimed the crusader, passionately, as he found it impossible to shake off his monkey-like foe—certain also that the fearful cries he uttered would bring speedy succour—'let me go, thou imp of darkness, and I will free the lady.'

'Nay, thou art my captive! I will have ransom, thou rude pilgrim,' was the reply, and again the shrill cry rang in Fitzwalter's ears. In a frenzy of rage, mingled with the fear of detection, the knight let the maiden's arm fall from his grasp, and she instantly darted away, whilst Edmund by main strength at last succeeded in loosening the thin sinewy arms that encircled him, yet with such difficulty that he tottered and would have fallen, had he not caught at a tree near them, to save himself. Two names carved on the bark (ah! he well remembered when they were inscribed) met his eye, and chilled his blood—'Edward Pauncefort.' 'Edmund Fitzwalter.' Suddenly

there flashed back on his memory the sunny day on which he and his slain comrade had stood beneath that oak, two gay boys, and how they had carved their names together as 'brothers-at-arms' in emulation of the knightly friendships which were the glory of chivalry. Stricken with a sudden horror, he covered his eyes with his hands, and groaned aloud; and that moment's pause saved the life of the idiot; for when, recovering himself by a strong effort, Fitzwalter turned, dagger in hand, to punish his puny antagonist, he was gone. Muttering deep and fearful curses, the crusader strode into the wood, where, at some little distance, two or three men clad in the garb of foresters were standing near a man-at-arms who held two strong horses.

'Where is the lady?' was the abrupt question of the latter, as the knight approached.

'She has for this time escaped me,' was the reply; 'we must to horse forthwith, Dickon. Are your friends here to be trusted?'

'Ay, marry are they! What would your knightship have them do?'

'Watch the road through the wood, and by any means hinder the first traveller who enters it, wearing a Cross upon his left shoulder, from passing to the Hall. If they can make him prisoner and bear him to any of your haunts, it will be well; but if he defend himself obstinately, spare not his life.'

'You hear, my masters,' cried Dickon. The fellows muttered a surly assent. 'We will meet in our forest haunt, Sir Knight, in a few days, and deserve a right heavy guerdon from you.'

The knight nodded to him, mounted, and rode off, whilst the outlaws hastened to the wood, by the Beech Farm, and disposed themselves in ambush on either side of the road, to intercept any passing traveller.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## THE MESSAGE FROM THE EAST.

She dreams on him that has forgot her love.  
 'T is pity love should be so contrary,  
 And thinking on it makes me cry 'alas!'

*Two Gentlemen of Verona.*

THE excitement of extreme terror supported Constance de Lingard till she entered the Hall, when she sank fainting on the stone floor. The domestics raised and bore her to the chamber of Dame Edith, whose cares, and the skill of the leech, gradually restored her senses, when, in broken accents, she requested them to send aid to the idiot, for whose safety she trembled, as she remembered the fierce and vindictive nature of him whose purpose he had foiled; and whilst some of the boldest of the retainers hastened to fulfil her commands, she related to the astonished Lady Pauncefort the strange scene through which she had just passed.

'The false traitor!' exclaimed the lady, indignantly; 'I marvel that we knew him not by the voice: it sounded strangely familiar to my ear from the first, but the white locks and his stooping figure disguised him completely.'

'But what could he mean by saying that I should not ransom Gerald, dear lady?' asked Constance. 'Can Gerald be a captive?'

'Pray Heaven he be not!' exclaimed the lady. 'Yet, perchance, the whole story of the crusaders' adventures in the East may be a falsehood, as is doubtless the tale of Gerald's forgetfulness of his troth-plight. I am utterly amazed, and had any other but yourself, my child, told me that Fitzwalter could have thus acted, I had not credited the tale!'

'I have been to blame, dear mother, in concealing from you as deep a treachery, of which this smooth-mannered knight was guilty long ago. Had I married Edward, I intended the secret to have remained buried in my own breast, but it is right you should now know it, that you may better judge what credence we should give to his words.'

And the maiden related to her astonished listener the declaration with which Edmund had pained and astonished herself, when on the eve of marriage with his dearest friend. The lady heard her in indignant silence.

'He must be falsehood's self, my Constance,' she said, as the maiden paused; 'therefore, believe not aught he has told us! We shall soon have true statements of the progress of the crusade; till we receive them, let us commit our beloved to the protecting care of Heaven, in humble and faithful hope.'

'Yet, dear lady,' said the damsel, 'I cannot help believing that the words he uttered in his vehement anger were sooth! I fear that Gerald is, in truth, a captive——'

'Tush, girl! if he were, how could *you* ransom him? His words were folly, as well as falsehood. Calm yourself, dearest, and I will send some of our most trusty followers, to try if they can discover any trace of our late guest. It is as well to be sure that he lurks not about the Manor.'

'And, dear lady,' said Constance, eagerly, as the Dame Edith rose to leave the room, 'I pray you ask if my poor champion be safe. I would not for all the world that he came to harm through the service he rendered me.'

The lady found the idiot in the hall, surrounded by the domestics, who were laughing loudly at the vainglorious relation of his late exploit with which he was amusing them. He was silent, and hung his head ashamed, as the Dame Pauncefort

entered ; but on hearing the orders she issued to the retainers, pressed forward, and eagerly asked permission to accompany them, declaring that he should know the dark pilgrim again anywhere. His request was complied with, and the lady made him doubly happy by her thanks and commendations, promising him that, when she was able to see him, the rescued Constance would herself thank and reward his brave service. Tears of delight filled the bright eyes of the idiot boy, and he turned to lead his companions on their search with an air of assumed importance that excited fresh though suppressed merriment.

Night had closed in ere the party returned, and the lady and Constance, who had passed the intermediate time in earnest conversation on the event which had broken the quiet monotony of their daily life, hastened to the hall on the first intimation of the searchers' approach, to inquire as to their success ; but as the door opened all anxiety on the subject was forgotten in a new surprise, for first of the party who entered and advanced towards them was the favourite esquire of the absent knight—Reginald de Tracy !

The youth wore a dark mantle, much travel-soiled and stained, his long dark locks hung damp and dishevelled on his shoulders, and the plume in the cap which he carried in his hand was wet and broken. Astonishment kept the ladies silent till he bent before them, and then the elder lady spoke.

'Reginald de Tracy !' she exclaimed. 'Whence come you ? Where is your lord—where is my son ?'

'In Egypt, madam, from whence I bring you his greetings.'

'Is he well—safe—free ?' asked Constance, eagerly.

'Well, and in safe keeping, lady.'

'Do you mean that he is a captive ?' she asked, clasping her hands.



'Tis a sad truth, sweet madam! The army of the Cross has been totally defeated, and not only the Knight of Leighton, but King Louis himself and many of the French nobility are captive, and our brave Salisbury, and the Counts of Artois and Poitiers are slain!

'Thank Heaven his life is spared!' exclaimed the lady. 'Holy Virgin, I thank thee I am not childless! Cheer thee, Constance! Look not so pale, and lean not so heavily on my arm. This thralldom will be of no long continuance. Seest thou not, De Tracy comes for his ransom? Is it not so, boy?'

'Ay, madam,' said the page, with some hesitation; 'and I have the promise of his captor's daughter—as fair and generous a Paynim as ever lived—that till that ransom come, my lord shall dwell in all safety and honour: in token whereof, madam, she bade me give you this casket in her name.'

The lady took the gift from the youth's hand, for Constance still trembled, and opening it, drew forth the chaplet of pearls.

'A right queenly gift,' she said, smilingly: 'it will well become your soft brown tresses, Constance, and, if our treasury prove too poor, help to pay our Gerald's ransom.'

Constance smiled as she took the rich gift.

'What sum doth the Paynim name as the price of my son's freedom?' asked the lady.

The squire hesitated, and grew so pale that Constance perceived it.

'The poor boy is exhausted, dear lady,' she said: 'let him have refreshment and rest, and then we can ask him further touching this unfortunate captivity. Go, Reginald,' she added; 'to-morrow you shall tell us all; and meantime, I will seek consolation by gazing on this pledge of the sweet Arab lady's promise.'

De Tracy looked relieved.

'I thank you, madam,' he said; 'I am weary and in some pain,'—he pointed to his arm, muffled in his cloak, which Constance now saw was stained with blood; 'I was attacked by robbers as I came through the beech wood, and but for the unexpected rescue which your worthy retainers brought me, I had not lived to tell you my tale.'

'Robbers in the beech wood!' exclaimed the Lady Pauncefort; 'nay, this is unheard-of audacity! From whence could they have come?' And then, as if a sudden recollection had struck her, she turned hastily, and calling the leader of the little party she had sent out, inquired, 'How they had sped in their search?'

'We can discover no trace of the pilgrim, lady,' he replied: 'we searched every lane and covert, and were just issuing from the wood, when we heard the clash of weapons in the road running through it, and hastening to the spot, found Master de Tracy defending himself bravely against four tall fellows in green.'

'They must have been Fitzwalter's retainers,' said the lady. 'See that the drawbridge be instantly raised, and good watch kept during the night. These crusades leave us poor women well-nigh defenceless, which calls for the greater caution on our part.'

Whilst her adopted mother was thus engaged, the Lady Constance had summoned her attendant, and with skill and tenderness dressed the squire's wounded arm. The hurt was trifling, but the lady insisted on the youth's retiring to rest, ordering at the same time refreshments to be carried to him in his chamber.

Early the next morning Reginald de Tracy was summoned to the lady's bower. He went with a beating heart, for the

communication which had appeared so easy when at a distance, became a matter of difficulty when present, and he could not think without a shudder of the horrible but necessary sacrifice of one of those fair hands which had so recently ministered to his comfort. But, again, he remembered the pale looks and tearful eyes with which Constance had heard of her betrothed's captivity; and convinced that he was acting for her future happiness, he began his tale boldly, at the lady's bidding, and faithfully related the scene in the Emir's palace, and the hateful Ransom which could alone restore the captive knight to freedom.

There was a pause when he ceased speaking. The Lady Pouncefort sat with clasped hands and blanched cheeks; but there was a bright glow on Constance's cheek as she rose, and taking the chaplet, which lay on the table near them, in her hand, said, gazing on it,

'The Arab maiden did not misjudge me; the Ransom shall be gladly given!'

'Not so, Constance! not so, my daughter!' exclaimed the Lady Pouncefort; '*my* hand will serve the purpose well. Who ought to ransom him but his mother?'

'Nay, nay, dear lady,' answered the maiden, 'do not seek to rob me of my high privilege! How cheerfully would I give life for Gerald! and shall I hesitate to purchase his life and freedom with a hand?'

The squire gazed on her with ardent admiration.

'Sweet lady,' he exclaimed, 'what will not my good lord owe you!'

'Nothing, Reginald,' she replied, hastily; 'he can owe me nothing for a free gift! May I pray you, dear lady, to send to London for a skilful practitioner, that our gallant young friend be not delayed on his return? Remember, a time is fixed, and

we must allow for the accidents of foreign travel, and adverse winds ; they may not be as favourable as they have been on his homeward voyage.'

'My child, my daughter!' cried the Dame Edith, in a voice of anguish ; 'you cannot know the torture it would cost you ! Your cheek has not paled, your voice not once trembled, at the prospect of pain worse than death. Bethink thee of the agony of the severed and quivering nerves ; the burning, throbbing pain that will nearly madden thee, even after the operation is over. Nay—it may cost thy life !'

'Mother, dear mother,' said Constance, shuddering, 'spare me ! It is cruel to make me suffer in imagination that which I must bear in reality. Spare me a needless anguish.'

'But the pain after the operation will not be great,' said the squire, hastily. 'Thanks to the saints, I have a box of precious ointment, made by a skilful Saracen leech, which, applied to a fresh wound, will soothe and heal it, even as soon as applied.'

'You hear, madam?' said Constance ; 'Heaven aids me.'

'My angelic Constance,' exclaimed the lady, clasping her to her bosom, and bedewing the fair forehead she kissed with tears : 'my sweet, gentle daughter—Gerald merits not this devotion. I cannot, I will not suffer it !'

Soothing her with kind and even playful words, and affectionate caresses, Constance gently withdrew herself from the lady's embrace, and unwilling to hear the further arguments she was certain would be urged by her to oppose her purpose, glided from the chamber ; whispering, as she passed Reginald, 'Follow me to my turret chamber, De Tracy ; I would speak with thee alone.'

'I would fain ask thee a question of much moment, Reginald,' she said, when, in obedience to her command, he joined her

there; 'wilt thou answer me, uninfluenced by love or fear of thy lord?'

'Do not doubt it, lady; I would die rather than deceive you; and though I love Sir Gerald Pauncefort, I *fear* no living man.'

'I pray you pardon me, Sir Squire,' said Constance, smiling, though mournfully; 'I meant not to impugn your courage or your honour. A report has reached me that Sir Gerald Pauncefort is much devoted to the Lady Cicely Fitzwalter—that he would willingly be freed from his troth-plight to myself.'

'I never heard the noble knight breathe such a wish,' exclaimed De Tracy; yet he coloured with apprehension of her further questions. 'Believe me, he holds you in all honour, lady.'

'He is the very soul of honour, Sir Squire—he ever was; but for his own sake I would know whether there is any truth in the tale I tell you. I would ask you from your own observation, and on your honour, if you believe he loves this lady?'

'Madam,' said the squire, hesitatingly, 'I cannot answer for the heart of another. The courtesy due to every fair and noble lady Sir Gerald yields to the Demoiselle Fitzwalter. But,' he added, colouring deeply, 'did I suspect him of infidelity to yourself, sweet lady, honour would command my silence.'

'I understand you,' said the maiden, sadly; 'you are a noble-spirited boy, and I would not have embarrassed you by such a question, were it not that *his* happiness depends upon my knowledge of the truth.'

'Sweet lady,' said the boy, earnestly, 'do not mistake me; I would not hint a suspicion of my lord's truth. But even if his fancy wavered for a moment—men, lady, are, you know, oft-times fickle—your intended sacrifice for his sake must make him eternally your own.'

Constance smiled, but it was a sorrowful smile.

'You speak well, and as if you were experienced in such matters, Reginald,' she said, 'but you cannot, if you would, deceive me! I read your downcast eyes and ingenuous blushes better than you think. But deem not the knowledge that he loves me no longer—' her voice trembled, but she recovered her self-possession by an effort—'will prevent my sending the Ransom that the Infidel requires. I rather rejoice that he will owe life and freedom—ay, and happiness!—to her he has forgotten!'

The boy's eyes filled with tears as he looked on her. Constance observed his emotion, and extended her hand; he knelt, and pressing it to his lips, sobbed passionately.

'Go,' said the maiden, touched by his natural and affectionate sympathy; 'go, dear Reginald. You have done well and wisely, and shall ever have my gratitude. Leave me, I would be alone.'

He quitted the apartment, and Constance, drawing from a writing-case pens and parchment, placed herself at the little table, and began the scroll which was to release her betrothed from his promise. But as she paused to collect her scattered thoughts, a thousand sweet memories of him whom she was about to resign for ever crowded on her mind. His image was so blended with every scene of childhood and of youth—had been so long cherished in her solitude—was hallowed by so many prayers for him in the house of God and in her solitary chamber, that it was like the pang of parting life to cast it from her—to resign the rich treasure of his affection to another; and, bending over the scroll, Constance laid her head upon her white arm, and wept bitterly.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## THE HAKIM.

Oh, Hero ! what a Hero hadst thou been,  
 If half thy outward graces had been placed  
 About the thoughts and counsels of thy heart !  
 But fare thee well,—most foul, most fair, farewell !

SHAKSPEARE.

**I**N a magnificent apartment of her Egyptian palace, the Arab maiden reclined on a silk couch, supported by cushions of crimson silk wrought with pearls. The chamber was splendid as the wealth and adoring love of the Emir could make it. Pillars of white marble supported the vaulted roof, which was fretted with blue and silver. A fountain played in the centre of the room, and round it were hung in golden cages many rare and beautiful birds. Sweet perfumes floated on the air, which was admitted through the open jalousies, and the light of the noonday sun was softened by screens of peacocks' feathers placed before the windows. The Eastern princess was as magnificently attired as when her proud sire challenged for her beauty the admiration of the Frank warriors. Her flowing robe of rose-coloured samite was a little raised by her recumbent posture, and showed the tiny slippers wrought with pearls, and the jewelled ankle. Her arms and neck sparkled with gems, the shawl which girt her slender waist was from the looms of Cashmere, and the rosary her small fingers idly grasped was of the holy wood of Mecca. But since that eventful night a change had come over her countenance : the bright eyes had an anxious and restless expression, and the glow on her dark cheek had faded. She was alone : it was the usual hour of noontide re-

pose, and yet she slumbered not ; the warm air, the song of the birds, the music of the falling water, had no power to soothe her into forgetfulness.

A door was softly opened, and a female slave, advancing with noiseless tread a few paces, looked timidly towards the couch as if to discover whether her young mistress slept. Zobeide spoke to her.

‘Thou hast tidings for me, Leila? Is my lord the Emir returned?’

‘No, lady ; but thou wilt rejoice at the news thy slave brings thee!’

The princess raised herself on her arm with renewed animation.

‘The sage Ismaël, he who can restore the fluttering life and raise the sick by his wondrous skill, hath returned. The Giaours have set him free.’

‘Allah be praised!’ exclaimed her mistress ; ‘I would not have had the Christian perish—as he surely would if the Hakim had not come in time to stay the fever—for the wealth of Istakar! Bid Ismaël come hither instantly.’

The damsel withdrew, and in a few minutes ushered the physician into the princess's presence. With a slow and measured step he approached the couch on which she was now sitting, and bent his forehead to the ground before her.

‘Thou art welcome, good and wise Ismaël,’ said the lady ; ‘I hail thy presence as the fevered earth doth the rising of the waters of our Nile.’

‘Thy slave lives but in thy favour, my princess. Allah hath preserved thy servant, and delivered him from the Giaours, that he may again serve and honour thee.’

‘And in a seasonable hour art thou come, O Hakim!’ said



the princess, eagerly. 'A captive to my lord and father's sword and bow lieth in extremity of danger. I have pledged my word to protect and succour him for a year. Thou *must* save him, good Ismaël.'

'Life is in the hand of God alone,' said the physician, solemnly; 'but thou canst command my skill, lady. May it please Allah to bless the efforts of the faithful, that His servant's name may be had in honour amongst a strange people. How long hath the fever been upon him?'

'Three or four days, and now it troubleth his reason so that he talks wildly, and knoweth not where he is nor what he doeth. I pray thee hasten to him, good Ismaël.'

'To hear is to obey, lady.' And with a deep obeisance the leech withdrew.

The attendant seated herself on a low footstool near her mistress.

'May Allah and our holy Prophet bless the skill of the physician!' murmured Zobeide. 'Didst thou give the slave the water-melons and the fresh flowers for the captive's chamber, Leila?'

'I did, madam; but the Frank (the Nubian told me) would not taste the fruit nor heed the flowers. The fever hath touched his brain, and he talketh wildly in his own tongue, often repeating the same words: methinks it soundeth like the name of a Frank maiden.'

'What is it, girl?'

'As well as thy slave can remember, Cicely, lady.'

'Perchance the name of her who should ransom him,' said Zobeide; and she sank into a reverie.

The slave, who was her lady's favourite and confidante, took the hand that hung listlessly by her side and kissed it.

‘Sweet mistress,’ she said gently, ‘I pray you think not so much of this Frank stranger. Bethink thee, he scorned our nation, and refused to put lance in rest for yourself. He meriteth not your favour.

‘Leila! it is because he so scorned us that I load him with benefits. I will *make* him retract those haughty and contemptuous words before he again meets the fair daughter of the West.’

The damsel shook her head.

‘Beware, dear princess,’ she said, ‘that thou bestow not on him too precious a gift! Since the night we saw these Giaours thou hast thought of little beside the English captive. Thy flowers, thy birds, are forgotten—thou hast ceased to care for aught save the Christian!’

‘Because I have pledged my word for his safety; because it is more natural to care for the welfare of a fellow-being who is sick and a captive,’ replied the lady, eagerly.

‘Ay, and because the infidel hath a fair face, and a voice sweet as the sound of falling waters,’ added the petted attendant.

‘By my father’s blessing! thou speakest like a fool, Leila,’ said the princess, angrily. ‘Believest thou that love is the sole motive of woman’s actions? Thinkest thou I could so far forget the glory of my house—my father’s faith—as to love an infidel and a slave? No, Leila; the soul of Zobeide scorns to be subject to another mortal. I would—like the beneficent genii who of old visited our people—shower blessings on the true, the brave, the virtuous, and be myself above the influence of their gratitude or their forgetfulness.’

‘If any mortal can resemble the good spirits of the air, my gentle mistress doth,’ said the young slave. ‘Pardon your slave, gracious Zobeide, if she erred or counselled too boldly; it was the mistake only of officious love and zeal.’

'Thou art pardoned, Leila. Take now thy lute and sing to me. It is long since I have heard it.'

And reclining again on her cushions, the princess shut her eyes, and the maiden, taking her instrument, sang, in a voice low and sweet enough to charm sleep to any pillow, an Arab lay.

It was long ere the skill of the physician conquered the power of the fever, but it at length prevailed, and Gerald Pauncefort awoke from a sleep produced by art, weak and languid, but in the possession of his reason. Beside his couch sat the Hakim, anxiously though calmly watching till he should wake.

'Where am I?' was the first question of his restored consciousness; but a glance round his chamber appeared to recall the remembrance of his captivity, for he closed his eyes again with a faint groan.

The physician rose, bent over him, and felt his pulse; then taking a cup from a table near the couch, put it to his patient's lips. Gerald drank eagerly, and feebly thanked his leech as he finished his long draught.

'Be silent,' said the Hakim, 'and, if thou canst, sleep again. Allah has stayed the sword of Asraël, but thy recovered life is yet but as a flickering lamp. To-morrow I will hear thy thanks.'

There was no occasion to repeat the injunction, for the knight had neither strength nor inclination to converse—scarcely to think, but lay in utter prostration of strength and spirit for many days, unceasingly the object of the tenderest care on the part of his physician. He was at length able to move from his couch and pace the room for a few minutes at a time, and he then perceived that during his illness many luxuries had found their way into it. Indian matting covered the stone floor, sweet flowers and delicious fruits were on the table; a fan of gay

feathers mounted in mother-o'-pearl lay on the seat near his couch, which was covered with an embroidered silk coverlet. The large cold stone dungeon wore quite another aspect. The captive marvelled at the strange change, but his wonder was interrupted by the entrance of the physician, whom he turned eagerly to greet.

'Worthy Hakim,' he said, as the grave Arab made his salaam, 'have I to thank you for the comforts of my prison cell, as well as for restored health?'

'No, Nazarene' was the reply; 'thou owest all—my attendance, these gifts, thy life itself—to the Light of the World and Rose of Paradise.'

'To the Lady Zobeide?' asked the knight, impatiently.

'Even so. Thou didst, like an infidel and rude warrior as thou art, set at nought and scorn the Pearl of our Egypt, and it is thus the princess avenges the insult thou didst offer her.'

'By my faith, a most magnanimous and generous lady!' said the knight, 'and, but for her idolatrous misbelief, worthy of a King's championship. I pray you, my good Hakim, offer her my most devoted thanks for her goodness. Though, by 'r Lady,' he added, mournfully, 'it would have been more merciful to have suffered me to perish.'

'Dost thou thus thank Allah for the continuance of His first great gift?' said the physician. 'But why expect aught else from a Nazarene? Have I not dwelt among them, and seen in our unhappy city of the Nile, their daily offences against Allah and His holy laws?'

'I thought your face was familiar to me, Arab,' exclaimed the knight; 'have you been recently at Damietta?'

'Ay, I recovered my freedom only in time to save the life you scorn, Nazarene. The deep wickedness of a Frank woman

set me free, and enabled me to do the beneficent will of the princess of my own people.'

'What mean you, Infidel?' asked the knight, angrily. 'Dare you thus speak in a knight's presence of a Christian lady?'

'If it be not lawful to speak the truth in thy presence, Sir Knight,' returned the Hakim, 'I will intrude on thee no longer. Yet I would fain tell thee by what means I gained my freedom, seeing that she of whom I spoke is not unknown to thee; nay, her name hath been often on thy lips during the wanderings of fever. Wilt thou hear me patiently and without taking offence?'

'I will.' But Pauncefort changed colour as he spoke.

'In the indiscriminate slaughter of our nation by the Franks, I should have perished but for the intervention of a daughter of one of their leaders. My intended murderers had dragged me within sight of her litter; she saw me, sent me succour, and finding I was a Hakim, took me into her own service.'

'I remember thee now,' said the knight, colouring; 'at the lady's earnest solicitation I once saw thee.'

'Thou didst, and I then told her that the skill of the physician could do nought to heal a wounded spirit.'

'And in return for the kind protection she afforded thee, thou dost belie this matchless lady,' said Gerald, angrily.

'Nay, thou hast said thou wouldst hear me patiently. I know thou lovest this damsel; and truly she is fair enough to be a Caliph's bride; but I deem, from all I heard of thee, brave Nazarene, whilst sojourning amongst thy brethren, that she is unworthy of thee.'

'On with your tale, Sir Leech!' said Pauncefort, impatiently, 'and if you prove not the truth of your words, you shall dearly aby slandering a lady.'

'Some twenty days past,' continued the Hakim, 'she sum-

moned me to her presence, and asked me if I could procure her an unguent, pleasant to the smell, but a sure, slow, and deadly poison, if applied to a wound. In reward for my compliance with her will, she gave me freedom.'

'Can this be true?' murmured the knight.

'True as the words of Allah, Christian. But hear yet further. I was curious to know how one so fair and young would use such a gift, and I tarried in Damietta to discover. After the vessel that bore thy boy attendant to England had sailed, I learned from one of the lady's damsels that it had been given to *him* by the lady, as a sovereign remedy, should she to whom thou, Nazarene, art betrothed, really sacrifice her hand for thee. The boy, unwittingly, has carried death to her—slow, lingering, torturing death. Verily, there is no wickedness like the wickedness of a woman!'

He paused, and his unhappy auditor sat motionless and horror-stricken for a moment; then, springing from his seat, approached the speaker.

'Poison, saidst thou?' he gasped, 'and sent to Constance? Speak!—tell me that thou didst prevent the hideous crime—that Cicely knew not that it was poison.'

'What I have said, I have said,' was the reply. Earnestly though wildly the knight looked in the face of the Eastern sage, as if he would fain read there the falsehood of his tale; but it was impossible to doubt the truth expressed in that grave, noble countenance; and as he met the dark pitying eyes of his preserver from death, the miserable Pauncefort pressed his hands upon his throbbing brow, and with a deep groan fell insensible at the Hakim's feet.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

## THE OUTLAWS OF THE NEW FOREST.

*3rd Outlaw.* Stand, sir, and throw us that you have about you ;  
If not, we'll make you sit and rifle you.

*Valentine.* My friends,—

*1st Outlaw.* That's not so, sir ; we are your enemies.

*2nd Outlaw.* Peace ; we'll hear him.

*3rd Outlaw.* Ay, by my beard, will we.'

*Two Gentlemen of Verona.*

IT was a cold, bright March morning ; the rising sun cast a red light on the short grass, and on the glittering frostwork which clothed the dark yews and fir-boughs of Leighton like a web of tiny diamonds. At the Hall door stood a bright bay steed, pawing the hard ground impatiently, as if weary of his rider's delay, and at a little distance from the groom who held him stood six or eight stout men-at-arms, beside their horses, their bluff English faces wearing an expression of deep pity and interest, as they discoursed together in low tones. The young squire for whom they waited came forth at last, bearing in his hand an ivory casket, and his followers remarked as he passed by them and sprang on his steed, that he had been weeping ; the tears even yet dimming his bright hazel eyes, and the tone in which he ordered them to mount and ride on being low and tremulous, not clear and blithe as was its wont. He had just said farewell to the gentle yet heroic lady, whose sacrifice was appreciated by even the rudest of his soldiers, and the heart of the youth swelled with emotions of mingled sorrow, pity, and pride in his fair countrywoman, as he grasped the casket which contained his lord's ransom. With the impulse of excited feeling he spurred hotly on, and had left Leighton

miles behind him ere he diminished his speed. The eldest retainer of his escort, who had known the squire from infancy, and loved him as a son, then rode up beside him, and anxious to banish the thoughts which he feared pained him, addressed him in a tone of kindly and respectful sympathy.

‘T is a shrewd, frosty morning, Master Reginald,’ he said; ‘by ’r Lady, I could scarce feel my horse’s bridle when we first started; but the pace you ride has sent the blood tingling through my old veins.’

‘I would I had one of those winged horses of St. Mark, whose likenesses the Venetians possess,’ answered the squire, ‘that I might journey as the bird flies, straight to the Nile, with my precious burden. Each hour seems an age to me!’

‘The saints speed you, Sir Squire, and bring you and our noble master back again, ere the next frost, to our poor young lady!’

‘I cannot doubt that her generous devotion will fail of its due guerdon, Stephen; but I am wretched when I think how her sufferings are increased by reason of my unfortunate loss of the precious unguent.’

‘Heed it not, Sir Squire. It is better, to my thinking, that our fair mistress suffer a little more in a Christian-like manner, than that she should be cured by art magic, or the medicaments of those terrible Saracens. The devil has taken his own again, be sure; for doubtless, if it dropped from your bosom in the scuffle with the robbers, *they* found it, and have kept it.’

‘Well, the Virgin help and support her, poor lady!—How long have you had such troublesome neighbours, Stephen?’

‘The villains have never visited Leighton before, Master de Tracy, but they haunt the great northern road and the county of Hants, and there is scarce a forest that has not its rangers, who are cutpurses as well as deer-slayers.’



'Heaven keep me from them,' said the squire, 'not because I fear for my own safety, but for the charge I carry, and the delay an encounter with them would occasion. If Sir Guy de Ville be not in London, I shall be obliged to follow him to Hampshire, which is too well wooded to be very safe; but his vessel is a fast sailer, and I am certain of a passage on board her.'

The little party journeyed together as far as Barnet, and there the young squire dismissed his escort; he reached London alone and in safety the next morning, but Sir Guy de Ville was not there, nor were any of the craft then lying in the Thames bound for the East. Reginald de Tracy, consequently, found himself obliged to proceed into Hampshire to join the knight, whose ship he learnt lay in Southampton Water. His journey had hitherto been prosperous, and on the fifth day after his departure from Leighton he gained the borders of the New Forest.

It was near the usual hour of dinner, and the young rider, who had the appetite of his age, rejoiced at the sight of a trim hostelry, promising refreshment to man and horse, on the very confines of the wood. Springing from his steed, and resigning it to a ready ostler, he entered the inn kitchen, from which sundry savours proceeded, announcing the coming repast. It was a large low room; a cheerful wood fire blazed on the hearth, on which a sturdy country girl was preparing the dinner. Several groups, all by their dress and appearance churls, were seated in the chamber, who eyed the new comer for a moment, and then resumed their own conversation or employment. The squire, who never lost sight of the casket, had rolled it in his cloak, and now laid it down beside him, as he seated himself at a table near the chimney corner, and ordered the host to bring

him a flask of wine. The order was quickly obeyed, but as the worthy placed it before his guest, with many commendations of its goodness and its age, he trod on the end of the mantle which hung from the table, and the ivory box rolled on the kitchen floor. Mine host picked it up, with many apologies for his awkwardness, but (unobserved by the squire, who was drinking with the eagerness of a thirsty traveller) exchanged, at the same moment, a glance with a tall, dark man, who stood near the chimney corner, whispering occasionally to the coquettish damsel who officiated as cook. The forester immediately withdrew, and the landlord stood with a face of hypocritical dulness, waiting the further commands of his guest.

‘Can you tell me, Sir Host,’ asked the squire, ‘how far hence it is to Lyndhurst? Can I reach it ere nightfall?’

‘If your steed be good, and you travel by the shortest road through the forest, you may, Sir Squire; but if you have parcels of charge with you, the way is scarce safe.’

‘I have nothing about me to tempt the cupidity of your forest rangers,’ was the answer, ‘and my steed is as fleet as the wind; so, if you can get me a guide, I shall even venture as soon as I have dined.’

The dinner was a long time making its appearance, and the volubility of the host, who officiously waited on the stranger, was incessant. After a longer delay, consequently, than he had at first intended, the youth mounted his steed, and followed his guide into the forest. He was obliged to walk his horse, both on account of the narrow pathway, and to keep beside the ragged and ill-looking fellow who served as his guide. There appeared no end to the road they traversed, which apparently led into the heart of the wood, and some uncomfortable misgivings were already arising in the mind of De Tracy, when

they suddenly found themselves before a huge stone, over which the now leafless branches of an oak stretched in gaunt majesty.

‘What stone is this, villain?’ asked the youth, pausing before it.

‘We call it the Red King’s Stone,’ was the reply: ‘here the French favourite slew his liege, William Rufus.’

The esquire gazed with deep interest on it for a moment, and then urged his steed forward, for the day was closing, and he was too well aware of the evil repute of the county in which he journeyed to like traversing the forest after nightfall. He remembered that the stone on which he had just gazed was near Lyndhurst—then a royal hunting palace—and he hurried onwards in the direction indicated by the peasant, in the hope of soon reaching his destination. But he was mistaken—the road he traversed led again to the thickest part of the forest, and he was about to turn back, in spite of the guide’s asseverations that they were in the right path, when a glade suddenly opened before them, in the centre of which blazed a huge fire, surrounded by about twenty stout foresters. A shout burst from them as they perceived the intruder: the youth was in a moment surrounded, and in spite of a brave resistance—in which more than one of the robbers were made acquainted with the temper of his good sword—he was taken prisoner, and dragged towards the blaze. A tall man, who appeared to be the leader of the band, then addressed him.

‘You have given us some trouble, Sir Squire,’ he said, ‘and therefore cannot take it amiss if we desire a guerdon for our labour. We have been told you carry with you the contributions of the pious towards ransoming the captive crusaders in Egypt, and that Sir Guy de Ville tarries for the same at Lyndhurst: we would fain ease you of your burden; you will travel quicker without it.’





*The Ransom.*





‘Free my hands,’ said the squire, ‘and I will show you the treasure that I carry: if you detain me when you have seen it ye will be worse than the heathen Saracens.’

The men who held his arms loosed them, at a sign from their captain, and the whole band crowded eagerly round to gaze on the ivory casket, which they believed to be full of gold and jewels for the ransom of the knights. The youth unfastened the lid with a small silver key suspended round his neck, and silently presented it to them. An exclamation, half of surprise, half of horror, was uttered by the robbers. Embalmed within it lay a small snow-white hand—the hand of a young and delicate woman.

‘What means this, youth?’ demanded the captain.

‘It means that the women of our land—of mine and your merry England, bold foresters—will make the infidel Moslems own that they have no peers in the wide world. The good knight, Sir Gerald Pauncefort, is the captive of a Saracen prince, who refused to free him unless he proclaimed in every land of Christendom that *his* daughter—the Emir’s daughter—was fairer, ay, and more worthy, than all the women of England.’

‘The blaspheming Infidel!’ exclaimed the leader; ‘I trow my buxom Margery were better worthy of a knight’s service than a black-faced savage Saracen, even though she be a princess! Marry, I hope the good knight said him nay?’

‘That did he, and boldly too,’ said Reginald; ‘he would not hear of such a shame to chivalry.’

‘Tis a good knight—Sir Gerald Pauncefort,’ said one of the band; ‘he loves the people, and is never severe on those who may catch a stray hare or rabbit when corn is scant.’

‘But the hand! thou hast not yet told us what it meaneth, Sir Squire,’ interrupted the captain, impatiently.



'The Emir was enraged at the knight's refusal,' continued De Tracy, 'and told him that he would put the boasted goodness of the women of England to the test. In short, he would take no ransom but the hand of Sir Gerald's lady-love—and behold, she hath sent it!'

A murmur of admiration passed round the circle, and something very like a tear stood in the eye of the chief.

'How say you, comrades?' he exclaimed, 'it were foul shame to hinder the youth in such an errand! Heaven forefend that this dog of a Saracen should not know what women we have in England. Faugh! it sickens me to think of his black moppet of a daughter. Shall we speed the lad on his way?'

'Ay, with a hearty good will,' replied one of the outlaws, 'after supper; but it were a pity to spoil Maud's cookery by our delay. The lad will not be the worse for a slice of venison, I trow.'

Reginald gladly accepted their hospitality, and following them to a rude wooden hut buried amidst the trees, found an oaken table covered with forest cheer, to which the whole party did ample justice. The captain and half the band then escorted the youth out of the forest, asking him, on the way, many questions of the far land from whence he came. When they parted, the leader of the outlaws extended his hand to the squire.

'Farewell, Sir Squire,' he said; 'bear the commendations of the outlaws of the New Forest to your lord, and tell him that *we* will watch over the brave lady who has ransomed him, till his return. Fare thee well, and the saints speed thee on thy way.'

De Tracy thanked his robber escort, and pursued his way without further hindrance to Lyndhurst, where he found Sir Guy de Ville, and two days after sailed with him for the Mediterranean.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

## THE RANSOM.

All that life can rate  
 Worth name of life, in thee hath estimate ;  
 Youth, beauty, wisdom, courage, virtue—all  
 That happiness and prime can happy call.

SHAKSPEARE.

**W**EARILY passed the months to the captive Pauncefort. The fearful communication which had stricken him insensible to the earth, laid him again for many days on a couch of mental as well as bodily suffering. The Hakim, who had not, perhaps, deemed that the crimes or death of a woman could have so powerfully affected his patient, tended him with equal skill and care, though in his heart he despised and marvelled at the Frank's weakness ; and the knight slowly recovered, but with returning health came strength of spirit, and he was able to think calmly, though with horror and remorse, on the fearful revelation made to him by the Arab. With remorse as well as grief and horror, for his heart reproached him for his recent devotion to the daughter of the Lord Fitzwalter—for having wilfully endeared himself to one whose only hope of happiness had thus been rendered dependent on another's death. 'He who sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind,' saith the Infallible Word, and never was its truth more fully proved than in the instance of Gerald Pauncefort. He had 'sown the wind' of folly, and vanity, and self-indulgence, and he 'reaped the whirlwind' of the passions he had roused, whose work was Crime and Death !

And death, as it ever does, awoke memory ; and the recollection of the lost Constance, in her loving and innocent child-

hood, in her graceful and modest youth, came freshly on his mind. He compared the two maidens, and blushed at his infatuation. He had cast away the priceless pearl for the false brilliant, even against the conviction of his own judgment and the dictates of his plighted honour, and he trembled with agony when he remembered that the self-devotion which he was well assured would ransom him, would as surely be repaid by a torturing and lingering death.

He had much leisure for self-communing in his lonely prison, and painful and bitter as it was, its effects were most beneficial. His character gained a moral firmness it had never before possessed, and the advancing year found him another and a better man. Hopes would at times arise in his mind, that the esquire might not reach Leighton, or that the fatal unguent might not be applied; and the length of time that intervened between the youth's departure and return, appeared to render the former a probable conjecture. For the voyage of De Tracy to Egypt was not favoured by the capricious breezes as his homeward passage had been, and the army of the Cross was on the point of re-embarkation when the vessel that bore him reached Damietta. The squire would not waste time in the town, which presented a very different appearance from that which it had worn the past year; but, procuring a safe-conduct from the Saracen envoys, who, encamped without the walls, were waiting the embarkation of the Franks to resume possession of their conquered city, directed his course to the palace on the Nile.

It was the evening of the fourth day after his arrival in Egypt that the boat which bore the young Englishman up the river reached the palm groves which surrounded the Emir's abode, and, with a heart beating with apprehension and hope, De Tracy landed, and hastened towards it.

His errand was briefly told, and after a short delay the steward or chief slave of the palace conducted him into a spacious hall, filled with guards, mutes, and other attendants, at the upper end of which the haughty and majestic Bendocdar was seated on the divan.

The boy stepped proudly between the long array of Infidels till he confronted the chief, and then opening the casket, held it towards him, saying sternly,

‘Infidel, behold THE KNIGHT’S RANSOM!’

The Arab vouchsafed no answer, but made a sign to an attendant to take the box, and receiving it from his hand, gazed long and thoughtfully on the fair hand embalmed in its odorous spices. If he felt regret or pity for the faithful woman who had sent it, his calm features betrayed neither; but, closing the casket, he desired the slave to summon the Lady Zobeide and the Christian captive to his presence.

The summons was first obeyed by the princess, who, as she entered the hall with her damsels, and recognized the squire, paused for a moment in agitated surprise.

‘Come hither, my child,’ said the chief. ‘Thou hast not forgotten the ransom I named for the haughty Frank who scorned the women of thy people?’

The lady bent her head in silent assent.

‘Behold, the daughter of the West hath sent it!’ And he pointed to the casket.

Zobeide leaned heavily for a moment on the arm of her faithful Leila, then, mastering her emotion, said calmly,

‘And the captive is, then, redeemed from thralldom, my father?’

‘Even so, daughter; I have sworn by Allah, and may not break my oath. By the Prophet’s tomb, I little deemed that there lived the woman who would have done this deed!’

Zobeide was about to answer, when a side door opened, and the ransomed knight entered the vast chamber.

For a moment his eyes rested on De Tracy, then turned towards his captor, and as he beheld the ivory casket in his hand, a strong shudder passed through his frame. But scorning to manifest emotion that might either gratify the hatred or awake the deprecated pity of his Infidel foes, he summoned all his fortitude, and with a firm proud step advanced towards his captor, saying haughtily, as he confronted him,

‘Thou hast the Ransom! Now what thinkest thou, Infidel, of the ladies of Christendom?’

‘Thou hast just cause to boast of their excellence, Nazarene, if all resemble this noble woman,’ said the Arab, gravely. ‘She hath ransomed thee. Thou art free!’

‘Nay, we part not thus, Sir Saracen,’ said the knight, fiercely. ‘Thou hast, by thy savage demand, sent a most sweet and virtuous lady to an untimely grave. Think not to escape scathless. There lies my gage: if thou hast the spirit of a true warrior, thou wilt raise it, and give me the combat I demand forthwith. If thou refuse, I can yet find true swords enough in Christendom to aid me, and by St. George I will soon return, and take a deadly vengeance for my lady’s suffering.’

‘Ha! dog of an infidel, what words are these?’ exclaimed the Arab, his swarthy brow crimsoning with rage, and laying his hand on the hilt of his scimitar. The knight folded his arms on his breast, and stood fearlessly expecting the death-stroke, which, in truth, he had no wish to shun; but Zobeide glided between them, and with uplifted hands deprecated her father’s wrath.

‘Spare him!’ she exclaimed. ‘Grief hath maddened him! Shall it be said that the great Bendocdar was governed by wild

passion, and slew in his own dwelling the unarmed captive? For the honour of thy name, forbear, O Emir! And thou, Nazarene,' she added, turning with dignity to Pauncefort, 'hast thou no gratitude? Hath not Zobeide been to thee as an angel of Allah during the dark hours of thy captivity? Dost thou not owe life, and health, and strength, to her cares for thee? Is it thus thou wouldst repay her?'

'Lady!' exclaimed the knight, throwing himself on one knee before her, and taking her hand—'forgive me! Thou hast been most generous, most noble, most excellent! Pardon me that, for a moment, I forgot the debt I owe the daughter, in indignation at the sire's cruelty. For thy sweet sake, I will forego my vengeance—ay, and in the fair island of the West will I proclaim that next to our Christian maidens there liveth not a purer, gentler, more magnanimous spirit than thine own.'

The young Arab trembled as he resigned her hand, and if Gerald could have seen through the downcast lids, he would have beheld her radiant eyes dimmed with tears of gratified feeling.

'Christian, I thank thee,' she said, in her low musical voice. 'Go; return unto thine own people, and Allah grant that thy matchless lady may have been preserved from the snare of the wicked.'

She passed her hands through the Emir's arm as she finished speaking, and with gentle caresses and soothing words drew him from the apartment, after giving a few brief orders to the slaves in her own tongue—for all conversation between the crusaders and the Moslemin was carried on in the *lingua-Franca*, which was the medium of communication throughout the East.

The moon had risen before the knight and his young attendant sprang into the Nile boat which was to convey them to

Damietta, and its light fell in a silver shower on the waving palms and calm diminished waters of the sacred river. As the released captive felt the fresh air of heaven again play upon his brow, and looked upon the beautiful and hushed earth which he was again permitted to tread in freedom, a thrill of happiness passed through his heart, for which the next moment he reproached himself. How had this blessed and never-before-prized liberty been obtained? The deep sigh that burst from his bosom was heard by De Tracy, who drew nearer to him in respectful silence.

'My gallant boy,' said the knight, restored to self-possession by the action, 'I had well-nigh forgot to thank thee for thy faithful service; albeit, I would far rather have died a captive to the Moslem than have beheld that fatal ransom!'

'You think too deeply of it, Sir Knight,' said De Tracy. 'My sweet lady was right joyful that it was in her power to redeem you from thralldom; nay, she would have given her own life willingly for yours.'

'Your words are daggers, Reginald,' replied the knight, greatly agitated; 'you do but show me how peerless was the noble creature who hath indeed died for me.'

'Died!' exclaimed the squire. 'Now the saints forefend! Who hath told you, Sir Knight, that the Lady Constance is dead?'

'One who knew but too well the fatal truth, boy.'

'St. George defend us! doubtless some fearful necromancer,' said the boy, turning pale.

'Reginald,' said the knight, laying his hand on the youth's arm, 'dost remember an unguent—a healing balm, which was given thee to carry to thy lady?'

'Ay, Sir Gerald—by the Lady Cicely; but unhappily I was

attacked on the road to Leighton by outlaws in the beech wood, and in the scuffle with them my precious ointment fell from my vest. I did not discover my loss for two days, and then searched vainly for it.'

'Lost!—saidst thou lost?' exclaimed the knight, wildly.

'Indeed, it is but too true, Sir Gerald.'

'And Constance lived—was in no peril of death, when you left Leighton?'

'She lived, even as I at first told you, Sir Knight; and the leech said there was no danger to be feared. The sweet lady suffered greatly, but bore her pain with a most angelic and saintlike patience.'

'Great Heaven, I thank thee!' murmured the crusader, and leaning his head on the side of the vessel, he wept long and passionately.

A weight of intolerable anguish had been removed from his heart, and it was some time before he could endure with calmness the overpowering happiness of learning that Constance de Lingard lived. Reginald feared that long imprisonment and excitement had troubled his lord's reason; for Gerald was even now unwilling to expose the murderess to obloquy by revealing her intended guilt, and therefore did not explain his extraordinary emotion. Greatly alarmed, the boy sought to soothe him, and draw his attention to the beauty of the banks as they glided on; and Pauncefort, no longer the prey of a remorse and horror which had nearly maddened him, yielded to his young attendant's efforts, and after a time conversed calmly.

Before they landed, a slave of the Emir's, who accompanied them to assure their safe passage, put into the knight's hands the casket, enveloped in a wrapper of cloth of gold.

'My mistress, the Lady Zobeide, returns thee thy ransom,



Christian,' he said, 'deeming—she bade me tell thee—that no gift would be as precious to thee as this pledge of matchless faith.'

'Commend me to thy lady,' was the Christian's reply, 'and tell her she hath read my heart rightly: this little hand is of more value in my eyes than all the treasures of the East.'

They reached Damietta in safety, and on the day following De Tracy delivered to his lord a letter with which the Lady Constance had charged him.

Thus ran the scroll, after the usual form of salutation:

'Your faithful squire, Master Reginald de Tracy, hath given us true tidings of your present evil condition, as a captive to the Saracen, and of the ransom which the fell Pagan demandeth of you. It shall be freely and gladly given, and may Our Lady and all the saints be praised for thus permitting the orphan Constance to repay (in a sort) the family who cherished her desolate infancy and youth! Grieve not that it hath so chanced, Gerald, but rather reflect on the great happiness I feel in being made the instrument of your redemption from thralldom. And now, I beseech you, forgive me for *that* which I am about to communicate. It is my intention—*my wish*—to take the veil, and all I demand of you in return for the willing sacrifice I make, is, that you will not thwart me in my purpose, but send (as speedily as may be) that renunciation of our troth-pledge which will enable me to dedicate my future life to Heaven. Our good lady, your mother, is in health, and sendeth you her benison, and prayers for your speedy deliverance. I commend you to the good keeping of God.'

The tale which the squire had related during their passage down the Nile, of Fitzwalter's attempt, disguised as a pilgrim, to carry off the Lady Constance—of the attack made on him—

self to prevent his reaching the Hall, which he doubted not was also a plan of the knight's devising—and of the maiden's questions with regard to his lord's love for another, fully explained to Gerald the true reason of Constance's sudden vocation for the cloister. He saw at once that she desired not only to release him from the chains of the Infidel, but (by freeing him from all ties to herself) to secure the happiness of the life she had redeemed; and thus meekly, thus unrepochingly, did she strive to reconcile him to his breach of faith, by making the dissolution of their betrothal her own deed!

Bitter was the agony of remorse with which he reflected on the pangs the report of his inconstancy—of his most blameable devotion to another—must have caused her. The perfection of her character—her meek faith, her self-denying love, her fortitude—filled him with self-reproach, admiration, and love. The delusion of passion was at an end; and at the moment Constance de Lingard resigned her lover, she bound him to herself for ever by the strong and holy tie of an affection based on esteem and gratitude.



## CHAPTER XL.

## UNVEILED.

Fare thee well! thou lovely one,  
Lovely still, but dear no more!

MOORE'S *Melodies*.

THE meeting of the scattered remnant of the army of the Cross was attended with much bitterness. All had been more or less sufferers. Many were reduced, by the payment of

heavy ransoms, to absolute poverty; all had to mourn the loss of beloved friends or near kindred, who had either left their bones to whiten on the plains near Massoura, or had been murdered by the Saracens, when wrecked in their passage up the Nile.

Louis IX. had ransomed himself and his ruined army for four hundred thousand livres, and the promise of restoring the easily-gained and speedily-lost Damietta to the Moslems. But he delayed his departure from day to day, in hopes of the return of more of the missing warriors, who might be captives to the Infidels. The arrival of the English knight, and the singular Ransom which had restored him to his comrades, were speedily reported to the anxious monarch, and an order from the palace summoned the crusader, the day following, to the royal presence.

When Sir Gerald entered the presence-chamber of the King of France, he found it occupied by the Baron Fitzwalter and two or three leaders of the crusade (waiting the coming of the King), by whom he was warmly greeted.

'By St. George, Pauncefort,' exclaimed the English leader, 'when I behold my brave lances dropping in daily, like arrivals from the dead, and remember how few, after all, may be expected to return, I half regret having engaged in this disastrous enterprise. My gallant friend, the noble Salisbury, merited a better fate than to fall by a madman's perverse folly. I would I had been beside him! He should never have sacrificed his own life, and those of our sturdy English, at that malapert boy Prince Robert's bidding.'

'Your pardon, my lord,' said Gerald, firmly, 'but the royal Count d'Artois has expiated his error by a hero's death. A brave soldier's faults should sleep with him in his sepulchre.'

'You are right, Pauncefort,' replied the old Baron, frankly; 'we will speak no more of it. If *you* can forgive the folly which hath cost you so dear, I must, perforce, follow your example; albeit, Salisbury's death weighs heavily on my heart.'

The entrance of Louis prevented any further discourse, and Gerald was shocked to perceive the change which sickness and grief had wrought in their royal leader since he had last seen him. The King greeted him with his usual kind and frank courtesy, and after a few inquiries concerning his imprisonment, led the conversation to the fatal battle of Massoura, desiring the knight to relate truly and without reserve all that he remembered of their disastrous defeat. Pauncefort complied, and narrated, not without deep emotion, the death of the gallant Salisbury, and that of the Count d'Artois.

'Our Lady be praised,' said Louis, as he concluded, 'that, although we have great and sad cause to repent his youthful rashness, yet, at least, Robert's death was worthy of his birth.'

'The prince fell like a hero, surrounded by misbelievers whom he had slain, my lord King,' answered Gerald. 'I would my own life could have redeemed his, for his gallant youth promised a most glorious manhood.'

The King's lip slightly quivered; he had a fond elder brother's love for the brave young Count, and for an instant he was silent.

'Sir Knight,' he said, at length, 'we have not forgotten that D'Artois owes it to your valour that he escaped the murderer's knife in Cyprus, to win the crown of the martyr, fighting for Christ's heritage; and we would pray you name some guerdon, suiting your gentle birth and knightly rank, which may prove to you that we are not ungrateful for the service.'

'Your Grace honours me by the remembrance of it,' replied Pauncefort. 'I claim no guerdon for the fulfilment of my devoir;

and I would only pray of your Majesty of France not to judge harshly of me if I follow not the Oriflamme on its further progress—I trust, to victory.'

'How, Sir Knight! fall off from our enterprise when the holy places of the earth are before you, and in a few weeks, I should say days, we shall gaze upon the pure waves of the Jordan? Is it so, indeed? My Lord Fitzwalter, you told us not that desertion of the righteous cause, as well as death and misfortune, would diminish the number Earl William and yourself brought to the crusade.'

'In faith, royal Louis, I knew not myself that Sir Gerald Pauncefort meant to desert us; albeit, I know his time of service with me has expired.'

'And wherefore, brave Englishman,' asked the King, 'have you forgotten the Holy Sepulchre? Captivity and wounds could not have changed the purpose or damped the ardour of so true a knight.'

'Your Grace does me but justice. My purpose is not changed—my pilgrimage only deferred. The lady—my betrothed bride—who hath ransomed me by so terrible a sacrifice, is threatened by the treasonable machinations of a powerful foe. I am bound alike by gratitude and honour to return and protect her. If she can forgive some wrong she hath had from me, I trust to make her my wedded wife ere I again leave England, and then will I follow your Grace to the Holy Land, where my Redeemer lived and suffered, and fulfil my vows, taken when I assumed the Cross.'

'And bring your fair lady with you, a gentle pilgrim, I trust,' said Louis, graciously.

By the King's command the young knight joined the evening banquet at the palace, and was presented to the Queen. Mar-

guerite charged him with many messages to the Queen Regent, for Pauncefort designed returning home through France.

‘Tell her Grace,’ she said, her bright eyes filling with tears—‘tell her Grace that France hath another son—and that, born in sorrow and baptized in tears, my boy is named Tristan.’

‘Your Grace’s commands shall be faithfully obeyed,’ said the knight; ‘I am greatly honoured by them, and will not leave Paris without seeing Queen Blanche.’

‘So you are really grown home-sick, Pauncefort!’ said De Joinville, approaching him, as the Queen moved away. ‘By my faith! my own heart is in sunny Champagne. I would our enterprise were over, for of a truth I see but little chance of our gaining aught save hard blows and beggary by it! Yet I have renewed my term of service with King Louis; I cannot bring myself to leave him in his adverse fortunes.’

‘Nor would I,’ said the knight, ‘did not duty require my presence, for a time, in England. I shall return as soon as I may to the army of the Cross. His Grace appears to feel deeply his brothers’ death.’

‘Ay, they were both dearer to him, I think, than Charles of Anjou, who hath no touch of human feeling about him. You know, doubtless, that he is on board his vessel, ready to sail? Well, the day the King, and Anjou himself, learned with certainty of the death of the Count de Poitiers—who had, it was first reported, been taken captive—the royal Louis and I visited him, and found him coolly playing backgammon with one of his knights!’

‘And what said the King to him?’

‘Marry, his Grace said nothing, but went behind him, leaned over his shoulder, and taking board and men and dice together, threw the whole into the sea.’

'A more certain way of making an impression on him than any other,' said Gerald, with a slight smile—'provided he had no other board!'

'You say truly. But here comes your sometime leader, the Baron.'

'Pauncefort,' said the Lord Fitzwalter, 'my daughter is not well, and is therefore, by command of her leech, confined to her own apartment, though not to her couch. She hath many messages and commissions which she would gladly commit to you, and much wishes to see you. Will you follow her woman? she will conduct you to her apartments.'

Pauncefort bowed: he had no power to speak. The dreaded moment was then come! He felt it impossible to refuse compliance with the Baron's request, but he would rather have faced death than the beautiful fiend who had become the object of his abhorrence. Nevertheless, he followed Marian through the long corridor and up the winding stairs that led to the lady's apartment, and found himself, by the time he had recovered his self-possession, in the presence of Cicely Fitzwalter. She received him with her usual graceful tenderness of manner, and, agitated herself, she did not at first remark the half-shudder with which he dropped her hand, and the stern composure of his pale countenance.

'Your father, lady,' he said, after coldly returning her animated greeting, 'tells me that you have commands for England.'

'Truly, yes,' said Cicely, 'but they can be briefly spoken. Be seated, Sir Gerald Pauncefort, and I will try to remember them. Nay! what a sad brow thou hast for a ransomed captive about to be restored to his native land!'

She spoke with one of those beautiful smiles whose fascination had never before failed her, but it was now unheeded.

'Few of our crusaders, lady,' he replied, gravely, 'have cause for unmixed rejoicing, and I—though I have much reason for gratitude—have also many causes for heaviness of spirit. Mine was a fearful and a hateful Ransom!'

'It was, indeed,' said Cicely, eagerly. 'Poor lady! I trust her generous sacrifice hath not been fatal!'

'I learn from my squire, that you, lady, kindly endeavoured to mitigate her sufferings by sending her a healing balsam!'

'Oh! I remember;—yes, it was an Arab unguent of great virtue, I was told;' and the speaker faltered and turned pale—so very pale that Gerald believed she was about to faint; but she recovered herself, and with a laugh, horrible from its forced mockery of indifference, continued, 'I trust it was of efficacy! Heard you aught of its effects, Sir Gerald?'

'No, lady,' he said, almost solemnly; 'the angel whose office it doubtless is to watch over the innocent, so ordered it, that the unguent never reached Leighton. It was lost!'

In violent agitation, Cicely Fitzwalter sprang from her seat, and gazed with distended eyes on the stern countenance of her former lover; then sinking on the couch, she sat pale, motionless, conscience-stricken, before him.

'Marian,' said the knight, 'I would speak with your lady alone for a few moments; leave us.' The damsel hesitated, but as her mistress continued silent, obeyed.

'Cicely,' said Pauncefort, as soon as they were alone, 'Cicely, I know all! The Arab leech who tended my sick couch, in my captivity, was the Hakim Ismaël, your captive and your agent in crime.'

'You speak riddles,' said the lady, who by a strong effort had regained her self-possession. 'Of what has the slave dared to accuse me?'



'Of a guilt which Heaven has rendered *intentional* only,' he replied—'of sending *poison* to your innocent and most unhappy rival.'

'A proper tale!' said Cicely, with passionate scorn, 'worthy alike of the lying tongue of an Infidel, and of his dupe's credulous vanity. And you believed, Sir Knight, that the daughter of the Lord Fitzwalter would stain her soul with crime for *your* sake? Go, sir, leave me: but that you are beneath my anger, you should suffer for this insolence.'

'I will leave you, Cicely—if I err not, happier than when we met some half-hour since, for of *actual* crime you are innocent. May penitence for the design of guilt yet awake in your breast, and win your pardon. For myself, I would, ere we part, as we now do, *for ever*, beseech you to forgive me for having trifled with your affections. I have been most guilty—most erring, and therefore have no right to judge you harshly. Believe me, once-beloved Cicely, I will guard the fatal secret I have learned with my life. And now, farewell for ever.'

She heard him in silence, her face buried in her hands. As he ceased speaking, she raised her head, and gazed on him with a look whose expression it would have been difficult to analyse, so blended in it were Love and Rage, Sorrow and Despair. It touched him: he rose and took her hand, but she tore it from him, and turning away with a wild, piercing scream, threw herself on the couch and hid her face in the cushions. The cry brought her attendant into the room, and Pauncefort, passing her quickly, hurried away. At daybreak the next morning he sailed for England.

## CHAPTER XLI.

## THE CONVENT.

*Isabel.* And have you nuns no further privileges?

*Nun.* Are not these large enough?

*Isabel.* Yes, truly; I speak not as desiring more,  
But rather wishing a more strict restraint  
Upon the sisterhood.

SHAKESPEARE.

**I**N the western cloisters of the stately Abbey of Romsey, towards the close of the year 1250, stood the beautiful and haughty Abbess to whom its inmates—nuns of the Benedictine Order—were subject. The lady's queenlike figure and bearing were worthy of her almost princely descent and distinguished office; for the head of the Romsey convent was always of high birth and of great interest in the county. She held a scroll in her hand, on which she occasionally glanced, as she conversed with a sister who stood beside her.

'It appears this lady is largely endowed by fortune,' she said, 'though she has but recently inherited the fair property with which she would enrich our abbey. In my more youthful days—ere I also had found that all earthly ties and pleasures are but vanity—the Dame Edith Pauncefort was a dear friend of mine own. We were both sheltered in the sacred community over which it has pleased Providence to place me. I marvel not that she desires her adopted daughter to embrace our Order.'

'In truth, holy mother,' said her companion, 'I have never heard a tale more singular and touching: to give her hand as the ransom of her betrothed, and then (when she has gained so good a right to his faith and gratitude) to abandon the world

for the cloister, in opposition to the will of one who has been to her as a mother !'

'T is passing strange,' said the Abbess ; 'but we have no right to reject either her desired profession or her rich donation because we understand not the motive of her actions. The Lady Pauncefort is deeply grieved by the Lady Constance's determination, but finding it unalterable, has yielded her consent, only stipulating that she should make her profession at Romsey. Her education has well fitted her for a religious life, and I deem that she will add another illustrious name to the list of those holy mothers in God, who have, before my unworthy self, ruled over this sunny spot of the Church's heritage.'

'And of whom none was more illustrious, or a greater model of sanctity, than our present noble and reverend mother,' said the nun, with ready flattery. 'When do you expect our new sister ?'

'It may be to-night, or on the morrow. You will see, my daughter, that a cell be ready for her reception. Her health is still delicate, and she will be only a guest amongst us till Easter.'

The Abbess turned away from her companion, and slowly retraced her steps towards the monastic buildings, from which the cloisters extended to the church. The sister remained for some moments gazing thoughtfully on the retreating Superior, malice and disappointment marked in every feature of her thin, sharp countenance.

'Thy successor !' she murmured ; 't is well, proud woman : in imagination, thy power is to extend beyond the grave ; but there lives one beneath thy rule, who, all lowly and unheeded though she now be, rules *thee*, and will hereafter be the guiding spirit of this branch of our mighty Church. Ay, when Amicia is Abbess of Romsey, her dignity shall not be a powerless sha-

dow, but she will recover the privilege of life and death within her own demesnes, possessed by her predecessors.'

And with no charitable feelings towards either the high-minded, though somewhat worldly Abbess, or the gentle Constance de Lingard, the nun Amicia moved slowly towards the church, and knelt before the high altar with an air of devotion greatly edifying to such of the sisterhood as were present, though her thoughts were in reality far more full of earthly desires and ambitious projects than those of many a statesman or potentate dwelling in the midst of that world she professed to have abandoned.

A new arrival was a delightful change in the monotony of a conventual life, and the sisterhood of Romsey Abbey eagerly expected the coming of the Lady Constance; and when she did arrive, curiosity, pity, and interest were all roused by her appearance. Her left arm was still in a sling, and no ray of colour lighted up the pale but perfect features on which they gazed. Her eyes, so darkly blue, were seldom raised from beneath the downcast lid; the bright golden brown tresses, at first falling on the rounded shoulders, but, after some days, closely braided round her head beneath the white veil of the novice, gave her the air and expression of a Madonna. Jealousy itself was hushed for a time by pity and admiration, and Constance had been some days an inmate of her convent cell, ere the whisper of disparagement was heard amongst the sisterhood; and then, although some wondered 'what the holy mother found to admire so much in the pale, quiet stranger,' and others thought her somewhat vain of the deep melodious voice which swelled beyond all others through the beautiful abbey church, all agreed in liking her, and, after their separate manner, in patronizing the future sister.

Constance was delighted with her new abode. The stately abbey was remarkable, even in that age of architectural taste and splendour, for its solemn beauty, and its site had been (as those of all monastic buildings generally were) equally well chosen. It stood in a rich, fair valley, through which rolled the bright and rapid Test. The mighty oaks of the New Forest bounded its possessions on one side—on the other, rich and sunny pasture-land. The Abbess, a kind-hearted, though haughty woman, was, from her old friendship with the Lady of Leighton, disposed to show every attention to her new charge, and the sisterhood, following the example of their reverend mother, treated her with caressing kindness. For the first few days of her residence within her consecrated dwelling, Constance fondly believed that she had left the memory of her disappointed love, and all her cares, without its walls.

It was on an April evening, still cold enough to render a fire desirable, that the novice joined her future sisters in the refectory. And after the Abbess had withdrawn, the nuns, stirring the blazing faggots, sought to amuse their melancholy guest with many wild traditions of the saints and miracles that had rendered their dwelling illustrious. Now they boasted of Saint Merwenna, and her power over her former charge even after the grave had closed above her; of the royal and pious Christina, for whose vixen-like treatment of her fair young niece Matilda they urged many plausible excuses; and then, with much energy and pious indignation, animadverted on the broken vows of the Abbess Mary, who had gone back into the world, to the peril of her soul, and had wedded an earthly lover—the gallant Matthieu d'Alsace.

Constance listened, and became gradually interested in the fate of those who slumbered in the grave, though she could not

join in the animadversions made by the self-righteous sisters on the beautiful and unhappy Mary. She remarked that one of the nuns did not join in the conversation, but sat somewhat apart, and, with natural curiosity, she gazed from time to time at her. The sister was of low stature, and remarkably plain in appearance, having sharp, thin features, and a sallow complexion, but her brow was wide and lofty, and her eyes keen and penetrating. Perhaps the nun observed the attention with which the maiden regarded her, for turning suddenly towards her, she said, in a shrill clear voice,

‘What think you of the legend our companion has been relating?’

‘I pity the Abbess Mary, rather than blame her,’ said Constance, timidly: ‘she must have suffered bitterly for her weakness, since the pangs of remorse could overcome even her love for her husband—a love to which she had sacrificed so much!’

The recluse smiled, but with a sarcastic expression that distressed Constance, who felt a sensation of equal dislike and fear of her, which she struggled vainly to suppress. Another sister then began relating some wonderful reports which had recently travelled from Oxford to their convent.

‘Father Francis says,’ she continued, ‘that the Franciscans are a sinful Order, and a stain on our holy Church.’

‘Father Francis is a Benedictine,’ observed the hitherto silent nun, with a sneer.

‘Ay, Sister Amicia,’ replied the other, simply, ‘and therefore he *must* be right. The holy father says, that it is well known these friars (and chiefly him they call Roger Bacon) rob the grave for the purpose of prying into those secrets of creation which Heaven hath concealed from us.’

‘The foul-minded, sinful wretch!’ exclaimed another nun:

'it chills one's blood to hear of such horrors. And fearful is often the punishment of such profane magicians, as I could prove, but that I fear to give you all evil dreams.'

'Never mind the dreams, Sister Bridget,' exclaimed a young novice, eagerly, 'I like to be frightened; and hark! it is the very night for a story! the wind howls so mournfully, and the rain patters so thickly against the casements. Prithee tell us thy tale!'

'There lived, some hundred years ago, a certain knight in Brittany, possessed of the finest teeth imaginable. Now you know there are many evil spirits in that country—loup-garoux, ghostly washerwomen, and I wot not what besides; the reason for their haunting it being, I have heard, because the Bretons are in some manner descended from the enchanter Merlin.

'Many a winter's evening did the knight listen to these evil and ghostly beings; but when all others drew closer to each other and invoked the saints, *he* only laughed, not that he really feared them less, but because he delighted in showing his teeth. But you wot well, dear sisters, that the evil ones will not be mocked with impunity! Now, it chanced that at a tournament at Rennes, the knight lost one of his front teeth by the blow of a lance, and, greatly mortified at the injury to his appearance—for he was vain as he was handsome—sought out a wizard, and offered him a large sum, if, by art magic, he could supply the loss. The necromancer consented, on condition that the knight should ride to the spot where a murderer still hung in chains, and bring him one of the dead man's teeth!'

The nun paused, and the terrified sisters uttered an exclamation of horror. Constance looked towards the silent Amicia, but she had drawn her veil over her face, and leaned back, as if sleeping or lost in thought.

‘The knight, as I have told you, my sisters,’ continued Bridget, ‘believed all the tales he professed to ridicule, and had no inclination to pay a visit to the gallows; so he determined to get the tooth in another and easier way. There was a monastery near his own castle, and one of the brethren—whose teeth might have rivalled those of the sinful layman in whiteness—had been but a short time dead. A bribe to the sexton procured his admission into the chapel at the hour of midnight: he opened the grave, and robbed the deceased friar of his still perfect front tooth! Leaving the sacred dwelling unseen, he returned to his own castle, and lay down to sleep; but his slumbers were of brief duration. He awoke with a cold shiver, breathing with difficulty, for the air of his chamber had grown moist, chilly, and heavy as that of the vault he had just visited, and there, at the foot of the bed, stood the form of the dead monk in his grave-clothes. The knight sat up in the bed, and gazed with silent horror on his ghostly visitant.’

“Wherefore hast thou broken my rest,” asked the spirit, “and robbed me of my tooth?”

‘The knight was too frightened and bewildered to reply.

“Unholy wretch!” continued the vision, “for the indulgence of a pitiful vanity thou hast profaned the sanctity of man’s last and only resting-place—therefore I punish thee through thine own degrading vice.” And approaching the trembling caitiff, as he spoke, he at a single touch extracted the unlucky Sir Lancelot’s remaining front tooth.

“Remember my words,” added the appearance, frowning sternly. “So long as thou shalt preserve the tooth thou hast plundered from the grave, thou shalt live; but when thou lovest it, thou shalt join me in the dull mansion which was no sanctuary from thy impious vanity!”



'The vision disappeared, and the knight remembered nothing more. He was found insensible by his henchman the next morning, and he would have believed the whole appearance a dream, had not the loss of his other tooth convinced him of its awful reality.'

'And did he lose the monk's tooth, Sister Bridget?' asked the young novice, eagerly.

'He feared to trust it from his sight,' replied the nun, 'and yet trembled for its safety in his own keeping; therefore, he had a box made of silver, in which he placed it, and laid it on the shrine of the Virgin in the cathedral of Rennes. From that period he became an altered man; he was scarcely ever seen to smile, but walked amongst men as if the shadow of the grave was on his spirit. He frequently related the awful visitation, and resented any doubt of its reality as he would the most deadly insult.'

'Methinks it were an easier doom to have died, than to live in such constant fear,' said Constance.

'Ay, but you have not yet heard all! As the knight was returning home from a carousal given in honour of the birth of his sister's first-born child, he—either deceived by the dim light, or confused by the wine he had been drinking—mistook his road, and found himself in a thick wood. Night was closing in. All the tales he had laughed at recurred to his mind with horrible distinctness, and he pressed on with wild and headlong speed, when, as the road widened, he thought he distinguished a party of friars in advance of him, and, glad of so holy an escort, called loudly on them to stop; they answered his cries by bursts of shrill laughter, and then throwing back their cowls, he perceived that the sacred vesture covered only the skulls of skeletons, who mopped and mowed at him with ghastly merr-

ment, ever and anon holding up to his fixed and horror-stricken gaze—A TOOTH! The knight fell insensible from his horse, and was found on the same spot by some peasants the next morning. On recovering his senses, his first resolution was to ride to Rennes, which was at but a short distance, and to demand whether the important tooth were still safe. Alas! the box was opened and found empty! From that hour the knight's strength declined, and on the anniversary of the day he committed the sacrilegious violation of the tomb, he died.'

The nun finished her story to a thoroughly terrified audience; even Constance was glad to accompany Amicia through the dark passages leading to her cell, rather than traverse them alone. Amicia herself was the only one who showed no timidity, but talked as calmly as before.

From that evening the nun sought the society of Constance, and though the maiden never felt quite easy in her presence, she could not in courtesy reject the friendly advances of a sister distinguished for piety and talent. The garden of the abbey was extensive, and filled with many rare plants: at the end of it extended an avenue of firs, beneath whose dark but unfading green grew the pale primrose and fragrant violets of spring. Here Amicia frequently walked, and often induced her new friend to accompany her.

One clear, bright afternoon, she was summoned by the nun to walk forth with her, and, as usual, Amicia directed their steps towards the same evergreen avenue. And as they paced up and down the long straight path, they discoursed of the duties and privileges of a monastic life, and Constance was struck, as she frequently had been, by her companion's evident distaste for it. Yet Amicia, when in her first youth, had chosen her own fate. Sometimes the thought suggested itself, that the

nun wished to prejudice her against the monastic life ; but ignorant that Amicia had any reason for disliking her residence at Romsey, and innocent of the jealousy which frequently gave a degree of bitterness to the recluse's speech and look, she rejected the thought as absurd and groundless. The sun had nearly set, and Constance was about to urge their return to the nunnery, when a low, plaintive wail met their ear. The nun started.

'Heard you not a cry of distress, dear sister?' she asked, eagerly.

'I did. Shall we go and discover from whence it proceeded?' returned Constance.

'From the wood—it came from the wood,' said the nun, 'and our rules permit me not to pass through the portal, although I have a key entrusted to me by the holy mother.'

The feeble wail was repeated.

'Nay, but for charity!' exclaimed Constance ; 'give me the key, then, good sister : I am no veiled nun yet, to be held by such laws ! Let me forth, to aid it may be a distressed fellow-being.'

The nun drew forth the key with apparent reluctance.

'I dare not transgress my rule,' she said, 'but go thou, gentle Constance, and help this unhappy one. Tarry not long, though, I beseech thee.'

Constance unlocked the door, and hurried out into the greenwood as the same plaintive cry was repeated. The lady perceived that it came from a female, who lay beneath a bare and leafless oak at some little distance from the spot : she hastened towards her, and bending down, asked, in the gentlest accents, if she were ill. No answer was returned, but the terrified girl felt herself immediately seized by a powerful arm. The pre-

tended woman sprang from the ground, and throwing a mantle hastily over the lady's head, bore her with a swift and powerful step through the underwood. If the nun heard her shrieks, she either would not notice them, or had hurried back to the convent for aid, and Constance found that she was wholly in the power of the ruffian. The pressure with which he held her hurt her mutilated arm, and, as he paused for a moment, she groaned deeply.

'Do I hurt you, lady?' asked a voice, less rough and unpleasant than she could have anticipated; and as he threw back the mantle, she beheld a handsome face, bearing, it is true, an expression of licentious daring, but still frank and good-natured.

'Yes,' she answered, mildly; 'my arm is, as you may see—for you have pulled off my sling—a handless stump, and the pressure hurt it. I know not what your purpose by this desperate violence offered to the novice of a religious Order, but if you be, as I judge, a robber, and would put me to ransom, it shall be the higher if you abstain from further cruelty.'

The robber stood gazing eagerly on her as she spoke.

'Lady,' he exclaimed, as she ceased speaking, 'answer me one question, as you hope for salvation. Did you give your hand to ransom your true knight, held in thrall by the Infidels?'

'I did,' replied Constance, with some surprise.

'Then, lady, am I and my brother foresters your sworn champions,' said the robber, eagerly, 'and I beseech you pardon me, that I have, in error, injured you! I was blithe to aid in carrying away a novice from those cross-grained old dames yonder, but I will have no hand in detaining you against your will. And yet you cannot willingly be going to take the veil, and disappoint the good knight when he comes home again?'

'I am, indeed, a willing inmate of the convent, good yeoman,' answered Constance, 'and by my own choice shall be a sister of St. Benedict. Beseech you, guide me back again to the abbey, and your service shall not pass unrewarded.'

The reply of the forester was forestalled by a party of armed men bursting from an adjoining thicket, and a man, who appeared to lead them, exclaiming,

'How now, Hugh of the Brook! hast thou caught our fair game?'

The robber glanced significantly at Constance, as if beseeching caution, as he answered,

'I have, Master Dickon; and now I suppose I may go, when I have had my guerdon,' and he extended his hand.

The man-at-arms threw a piece of gold into it.

'Take thy wages,' he said, 'but thou goest not from us till the bird be caged, worthy Hugh: thou hast too many friends in the forest, for us to trust thee alone; so, forward with us, and thou shalt see our fair county of Oxford ere thou chase the New Forest deer again.'

The forester muttered an oath, but drew back amongst the men-at-arms, who were all well mounted, and Dickon, placing Constance on a pillion behind his own saddle, desired Hugh to mount behind one of the other riders. To the repeated entreaties of the lady, that he would, at least, tell her by whose orders this outrage was committed, the ruffian only answered, 'Thou wilt know anon, madam;' and then, in sullen silence, pursued his way. At nightfall they paused to rest at a miserable hostelry; but a glance at the countenances of the host and hostess convinced the captive maiden that an appeal to their compassion or honesty would be utterly fruitless.

She shuddered as she was led into a large damp old chamber,

dimly lighted by a single lamp, and left there in solitude. Constance had at once divined that Edmund Fitzwalter was the author of the outrage she was suffering, and the memory of his violence and vindictive malice gave her a cold chill of fear, as she reflected how completely she was now in his power. A suspicion, too, arose in her mind, that the nun had been a participator in the scheme of abduction. She remembered the indistinct impression she had felt, on first seeing Amicia, of a likeness between the sister and some person whose features were familiar to her, and now her fear or her fancy assimilated them to those of Sir Edmund Fitzwalter.

Constance, fearing that after the sacrifice she had made for him Gerald Pauncefort would hold himself dishonoured by the breach of his troth-plight, had resolved to secure his happiness at her own expense, by placing an insurmountable barrier between them. His happiness was far dearer to the affectionate girl than her own, and as soon as returning health permitted, she resolved to bury her griefs in the cloister. By the recent death of a distant kinsman, she had inherited a fair property near Romsey, and this—united to the high character of the abbey for sanctity—determined her on selecting it as her final resting-place. She had believed, with the credulity of a saddened and broken spirit, that the abbey walls would shut out the cares and thoughts of earth, and that in a new, a higher, and a holier destiny, she should forget her former hopes, and their disappointment. Experience had already taught her the futility of such an expectation. She found that the silent but fervent prayer in her lonely chamber at Leighton Manor had ministered to her depressed spirits more effectually than did the tedious forms and monastic rules by which she had now surrounded herself. The art (or kindness, as she had at first

deemed it) of Sister Amicia, had displayed to her the mere worldliness, the petty cares and intrigues of a nunnery, of which she might otherwise have probably remained ignorant till her final profession. Yet, for Gerald's sake, she would have persisted in her intention, had she not been forcibly torn from the nunnery. In the midst of all her fear and horror at her present position, therefore, she felt a secret relief at being out of the sanctuary she had herself chosen, and a hope—a kind of presentiment—of deliverance, that sustained her strength and courage.

At the break of day they again set forward. Hugh of the Brook was standing idly near the inn door, and as the lady passed, whispered hurriedly,

'Fear not; we will deliver you, madam!'

Constance could answer only by a smile of gratitude, for Dickon turned at the instant, and she dreaded to awaken his suspicions by speaking.

Without any possibility of escape presenting itself to the captive lady, they reached the neighbourhood of Oxford, and Constance de Lingard was led to the same apartment in Fitzwalter's stronghold that had so often witnessed the tears of the yeoman's daughter. But the rooms had been newly furnished with all that might befit the bride of its knightly master, and a female attendant provided for her. Nothing remained of the former furniture of the chamber save an Eastern cabinet of some value. A few rare books, materials for writing and missal painting, showed that the tastes of Constance had been remembered and cared for.

Two days passed anxiously away, and on the evening of the third, as Constance was sitting near the loophole, watching the declining daylight, the blast of a horn without, and the rattling

of the drawbridge, announced a visitor, whom her fear at once divined to be her captor. The lady trembled violently, and half rose from her seat; then summoning all her natural courage to her aid, and breathing a murmured prayer, prepared to meet her violent and unprincipled suitor with the gentle firmness to which he had often bowed in early boyhood.

A hurried tread upon the stairs and in the corridor was audible; the door was thrown open, and Edmund Fitzwalter stood before her. She rose from her seat, and fixed her calm, reproving eyes upon him, with a glance that made him pause in silent hesitation. She was the first to speak.

‘It is Sir Edmund Fitzwalter, then, whom I have to thank,’ she said, ‘for tearing me from my peaceful sanctuary, and adding to the bitterness of a destiny which was already sufficiently miserable.’

‘Forgive me, Constance,’ exclaimed the knight, eagerly; ‘I meant not to grieve or injure you, but to save you from the living tomb you had so rashly chosen. Sure am I that you would, when too late, have regretted your choice, nor do I yet despair of reconciling you again to the world you had abandoned.’

‘You have chosen a somewhat singular mode of doing so, Sir Knight. I never heard of captivity and outrage being selected as the means of recommending the world to one who had chosen the cloister as her future dwelling-place.’

‘Mock me, reproach me, as you will, Constance—I expect and will endure all from you; but I could not bear to lose you for ever. I could not bear to think of the withering waste of life you must support within that hateful convent. It was your happiness I chiefly sought in tearing you from such a fate: forgive me if I have erred.’



'Restore me to freedom,' she answered, 'and I will pardon your folly in deeming yourself a better judge of my inclinations than I am myself. A higher power only can absolve you from the sin of robbing the Church of a devout, though unworthy, handmaiden.'

'Nay, gentle Constance! I should cast from me my better angel—my only hope of future pardon with Heaven—did I part from you. You *must* be mine. As my wife only shall you leave this place. Nay, hear me—I know what you would say—you still love one who is utterly unworthy of you!—Ay, unworthy! since he could prefer mere beauty to your holy loveliness of character and person. While I, Constance—violent and evil as is my nature—have nevertheless ever appreciated you, always adored you. You alone can restrain me from sin—can restore my soul to its lost integrity. It is an angel's office—will you reject it?'

He spoke with passionate vehemence, and grasped her hand eagerly as he finished his wild words.

'It is neither the office of an angel nor of a mortal, mistaken man,' she answered; yet her voice was gentle and even soothing. 'He only who made the heart, can purify and renew it. Restore me to my holy refuge, and I will do all that a creature may for you; I will intercede day and night at the altar for your eternal and temporal weal.'

'And who can doubt the efficacy of your prayers, sweet saint? Yet methinks both would [be more assured by having my guardian angel's eye ever upon me. Think, Constance, I implore you, how worthy of your good and self-denying nature it would be to save and reform a sinner. I could not live in the light of those pure eyes without becoming a better and a happier man.'

‘This is folly, Fitzwalter, I can never be your wife, nor, if I were, would my influence over you be such as you would have me think. I have known you long, Edmund, even from childhood, and I have ever marked how eagerly you sought any object which appeared unattainable, and when gained, how speedily you cast it from you. I know not what secret sins oppress your conscience, nor would I shrive you; but never could I wed with one who has shown, by his recent conduct towards myself, and by his former treachery to his friend, that no laws, divine or human, can restrain his ungovernable passions.’ The knight’s dark eyes flashed with anger.

‘Tis well, lady,’ he said, in a tone of suppressed rage; ‘you observe and reason shrewdly on the faults of one whose errors have been caused by loving you too well. It had been better for yourself if you had as truly noted those of the thankless knight who has won unsought a love he values not. It appears to my poor judgment that you sympathize in the perversity you ascribe to me, and might, in charity, if not for shame, be more lenient.’

The pale cheek and brow of Constance de Lingard were crimsoned as he spoke.

‘Rude and discourteous as you are treacherous,’ she exclaimed, ‘do you dare insult me thus? Leave my presence, Sir Edmund—I despise as much as I detest you.’

‘I would obey you, fair Constance,’ he replied, ironically, ‘but that I am fixed to the spot by surprise and admiration. By St. George, I would have roused that latent spirit ere now, had I known how well shrewishness becomes you. It is pity that you never favoured the happy Pauncefort with a touch of it: he has a fancy for the heroic, and perchance found too much sweetness cloying.’

The lady was silent. By a strong effort she subdued the angry rejoinder that rose to her lips; but fear and anguish and outraged feeling overcame her, and she sank on her seat and wept bitterly. Fitzwalter gazed on her with malignant pleasure, for the fierce evil of his disposition had been roused by her angry declaration of dislike, and he sought not to soothe her; but she felt that his eyes were on her, and pride lent her courage.

'I blush,' she said, at length, struggling against her tears, 'I blush that I should have been provoked beyond the bounds of maidenly patience and modesty by your discourteous taunts, Sir Edmund. I am a captive, helpless, and in your power; yet if one spark of chivalrous feeling or knightly honour remain in your heart, I implore you to leave me! I am still weak from long suffering, and unable to converse longer with you.'

'I will obey you, lady, not being altogether the monster you deem me; but to-morrow at this hour expect me, and with me a holy friar, even now within the castle, who—despite your waywardness—shall make you the wife of him whom you have scorned, and who will no longer humour the prejudices of a weak, fantastic girl.'

He turned from her, and she shuddered as she heard the clang of his mailed foot as he strode angrily down the corridor. Alone, and nearly hopeless of succour from her wild friend of the forest, Constance yielded to tears of anguish and despair. She resumed her former seat near the loophole, which commanded a view of the darkening landscape, and was gazing in tearful sadness on the winding road beneath the tower—which she now believed she would never pass save as the bride of the terrible Fitzwalter—when she observed the approach of an indistinct but moving mass, whether of black cattle or of men it was too dark for her to distinguish. As the group entered a

thick pine-grove bordering the road, they separated, and the unconsciously interested spectator lost sight of them altogether.

A short interval of time elapsed, and then two travellers on foot were visible, wending their way towards the drawbridge. As they paused before it, and one of them wound his horn, Constance perceived that they were peasants, bearing a huge basket, probably of vegetables or provisions of some sort for the inmates of her prison. The poor girl sighed deeply; for, clinging, as the unhappy ever do, to the faintest gleam of hope, she had for a moment deemed that the indistinct forms might be those of her promised deliverers. The fallacy of her belief was apparently confirmed by the lowering of the drawbridge and the admission of the peasants, after an interchange of a few words with the warder—in audible of course to her. With a sickening feeling of disappointment she rose and paced the room, regardless of the gloom which began to obscure it, for her usual attendant had not yet brought her lamp. No noise disturbed the current of her sad thoughts for nearly half an hour; then a second lowering of the bridge again attracted her to the loophole. To her amazement, a body of men-at-arms, some of them bearing torches, issued forth, and paused till Edmund Fitzwalter, in armour, joined them and rode to their head. The peasants, mounted behind two soldiers, were brought immediately behind him. By the torchlight Constance perceived them defile over the bridge, when, just as they gained the road, something glittered for a moment in the air, and the charger on which the knight rode sank beneath him. A shout of surprise from his followers was accompanied by a shrill blast from the cow-horn of one of the peasants, and a body of men rushed instantly from their ambush in the wood, and attacked the men-at-arms with desperate fury. The flickering light of the

torches rendered it impossible for the lady clearly to distinguish what next took place. She saw only that, disengaged from his fallen steed, Fitzwalter headed his men, who, by the suddenness of the attack, had been forced back on the bridge. All then became confusion, but the noise of shouts and the clash of arms continued to reach her ears even in her lofty tower.

At length the strife appeared to terminate by the defeat of the assailants, as all the combatants rushed, or were driven, from the bridge to the road, on which she could distinguish several dark heaps: she shuddered as she thought they might be the bodies of the slain. The men-at-arms then returned slowly to the tower, and by the light of torches sent from it to meet them, Constance saw that they bore with them a wounded man on a bier. Fitzwalter was not to be seen. The drawbridge was again raised, and she could only imagine that the attempt to rescue her, which she had just witnessed, and which she doubted not had been undertaken by the Hampshire outlaws, had failed. It was a bitter disappointment, for it seemed to render her captivity hopeless.

All was darkness and silence without the tower, and Constance sat in torturing suspense for some time afterwards, in her dark chamber, wondering that Dickon had not brought her a light, and that her female attendant was still absent; when a heavy step announced the approach of the former, who immediately afterwards entered the room. He carried a lamp, and a dark scowl was on his brow.

'Wherefore are you alone and in darkness, lady?' he asked, sullenly.

'You can best answer that question,' replied Constance; 'I might rather ask, wherefore you have brought me no light?'

'I sent one to your chamber by that saucy quean, Marget,

who has tarried elsewhere, gossiping, I suppose,' was the answer. And he proceeded to light the lamp.

'What has been the matter without?' asked the lady; 'and who was the wounded man you bore back to the castle?'

'My master, the good knight of Baynard's Castle,' was the reply. 'We were lured forth by a false traitor, one of the forest rangers of Hampshire, and their captain thought to have shot my good lord with an arrow, and have forced his way into the tower at the head of his band of cutpurses; but we have driven the rogues back into the wood, not without some loss, I warrant you, of their number. They will not again have the insolence to think of robbing a knight's stronghold as they would a goodwife's hen-roost.'

'Is Sir Edmund much hurt?' inquired Constance, anxiously.

'For the matter of that I have seen worse hurts; but arrow-wounds are ill to bear, and we have no leech at hand. But why do I waste time in words? Thanks to the saints—St. Nicholas above all—I have in yonder chest a precious unguent, which will make him fit to bear his armour in three days at the furthest, if all he who once owned it told me be true.'

He advanced to the Eastern cabinet which we have already noticed, opened it, and drew forth a small silver box, on which he gazed with a look of superstitious respect.

'T is an Eastern medicament, a magical drug,' he said, 'which I thought to have kept for my own cure, if need should be; but there will be enough for Sir Edmund and for me also, and he is my true friend as well as very good lord.'

He left the apartment, and Constance, to whom the tidings he had communicated were as a blessed reprieve from worse than death, breathed a thanksgiving for her own present safety, and a prayer for her gallant but unfortunate champions. They

had at least gained time for her: Fitzwalter might not recover as quickly as the ruffian deemed probable; and as she reflected on his words, it suddenly occurred to her that the unguent of which he spoke must be that which De Tracy had lost in the beech wood. Anxious to see if he had removed the box, or only taken out part of its contents, she opened the cabinet drawer, which he had left half closed, and looked into it. It was empty, but for a knot of ribbon which lay at the bottom of it. The lady took it up, and uttered a faint cry as she gazed on it. It was a gift from herself to Alinor Perrot! She recognized her own peculiar mode of tying the gay cherry-coloured bow, and the small silver bodkin still attached to it, and remembered the bright spring morning on which she had rewarded the peasant girl's offering of the first violets of the year, by the suit of cherry ribbons. This, then, had been the prison of the yeoman's pretty daughter. It was Fitzwalter who had brought sorrow and death upon the once blithe maiden of the Beech Farm!

As all the woe, and death, and desolation the knight's un-governed passions had caused flashed on Constance's mind, she sank on a seat with a low groan of terror and despair.

She was wholly in the power of this unprincipled and heartless man! and as she thought of the unfailing success which appeared to have attended his schemes hitherto, the hopelessness of escaping from him overwhelmed her with anguish.

She shuddered as it occurred to her that her present jailer must be the very man whom she had seen at Mab's hut, and—brief as had been her glimpse of his person through the half-closed door—she now marvelled that she had not at once remembered him. Her reflections were interrupted by the entrance of her waiting-woman, a good-humoured but simple

country girl, who made many excuses for her long delay, and brought a message from the wounded knight, begging the Lady Constance to be under no alarm at the disturbances which had taken place, as the treason of the robber churls was defeated, and the tower might set all open attacks at defiance. 'He hoped,' she added, 'to see the lady on the morrow.'

Constance answered only by a deep sigh. Her chance of deliverance by means of the robbers was gone; and if Sir Edmund recovered as rapidly as his message led her to expect, what might not be her fate?

Fitzwalter had assured her that a monk—doubtless a creature of his own—was even then in the tower; and she was aware that many reasons would induce him to hurry the completion of his infamous scheme. The insulted Church would be active in its search after the lost novice—the secret of her captivity was known to the whole band of New Forest outlaws, who, guided by Hugh, had followed her thus far already—and both herself and her newly-acquired wealth (which she was well aware would be very acceptable to the impoverished crusader) might be lost, should he delay the threatened nuptials.

Bitterly did the poor girl weep as she knelt that night in earnest prayer. Hope failed her, for if succour came, it would probably arrive too late, and find her bound for life to the destroyer of Alinor Perrot. Constance laid her head throbbing with feverish excitement on her pillow, and it was long ere 'Nature's balmy nurse' lulled her wearied spirit into forgetfulness.





## CHAPTER XLII.

## THE UNGUENT.

It is too late ; the life of all his blood  
 Is touched corruptibly ; and his pure brain,  
 Which some suppose the soul's frail dwelling-house,  
 Doth by the idle comments that it makes,  
 Foretell the ending of mortality.

SHAKSPEARE.

IT was the dead of night, and the lamp that lighted the chamber in which lay the wounded Fitzwalter was waxing dim, when the squire, who slept in the apartment to render him any needful service, was roused from his slumbers by the deep groans of his lord. He started up and approached the knight's couch.

'Art thou here, Richard Trafford?' said Edmund, endeavouring to raise himself on his arm. 'Fly, my good boy, and bring hither the priest who tarries in the tower: he must have some skill in leechcraft. I fear me, the unguent which Dickon applied to my arm and side was of a poisonous nature; my wounds burn as if bathed in living fire. Hie thee, Richard, and bring hither the monk.'

The youth obeyed, taking the lamp with him, and leaving the wounded man in darkness. The time that elapsed between the departure and the return of his attendant was a fearful interval for Fitzwalter. The fire raged in his veins as well as in his exasperated wounds; his tongue clove to the parched roof of his mouth, dry and burning with intolerable thirst; and his fevered imagination conjured up a bloody phantom that stood beside his couch, visible even in the thick darkness, mocking

and gibing at him, as if threatening an eternity of such torture. There was a stern fortitude in the character of Edmund Fitzwalter that enabled him to support this fearful agony of a wavering intellect for some time; but at length nature could endure no more, and his wild shrieks hastened the returning steps of Trafford and the attendants he had summoned.

‘The priest, the priest!’ he shouted, in accents of despair, as Richard entered; ‘villain, why have you not brought him?’

‘By your good patience, Sir Knight,’ answered Trafford, ‘it was but a hedge priest—a very scurvy friar—and lo you, when we came to call him, we found Dickon in his chamber, and an empty wine-flagon lying between them: they were both fast asleep, and I might as well seek to awaken one of the Seven Sleepers of Christendom. Kicks, blows, and oaths can win nothing but a grunt from the drunken swine.’

The knight groaned heavily.

‘And I must die thus,’ he murmured—‘perish like a parched scroll, unshriven, unaneled, and go to a yet fiercer torment!’

‘So please you, my young master,’ said William of Crosslands, a yeoman who had served the knight’s father, ‘we shall have a priest here anon. I have sent off John o’ the Byres to Oxford on your fleetest horse, to bring back a reverend friar; and if you will but let us remove the bandages, with this devil’s balsam on them, perchance the holy man may be able to undo any harm caused by Dickon’s medicament.’

The knight groaned an assent, and his rough nurse proceeded to loosen the dressings, but so tenaciously did they adhere, that the sufferer repulsed him with a fierce cry of agony, and the terrified group who now filled the chamber gazed in mute perplexity on each other.

‘By St. George,’ muttered William, ‘I would hang that dog

Dickon from the battlements straightway, were he not drunk. One would not kill soul and body; but he shall not escape me.'

'I will go to the lady,' exclaimed Trafford, suddenly, 'and tell her of our present strait. She must be less than woman if she refuse her aid. She will know better than we do how to help Sir Edmund.'

He left the room ere he had ceased speaking, and hurried to the apartments of Constance de Lingard. His request was briefly stated to her roused attendant, and hastily donning her robe and mantle, the lady followed the young squire to the sick-chamber. As she glided to the side of the couch, the knight started, and again uttered a loud cry.

'Art thou, too, come to haunt me, poor Alinor?' he said, wildly addressing her. 'I did not shed thy blood! Avaunt to thy quiet grave! I would,' he added, in an altered tone, 'that thou couldst send the snow in which thou didst perish, to cool my burning brow! I suffer as the priests say we shall hereafter.'

'Hush, Edmund,' said Constance, as she laid her cold and trembling hand on his, 'it is I, Constance de Lingard, who would fain use my poor skill to aid thee. Let me remove this fatal bandage.'

'Thou, Constance! and thou wouldst aid him who has wronged thee! Fair, pitying angel, thou shalt do with me as thou wilt!'

The maiden hastily ordered warm water to be brought, and after thoroughly wetting the stiffened dressings, with the assistance of Trafford, gently removed them.

'I would,' she said, with a sigh, pausing in her task, 'I would I had two hands!' It was the first and last time such a wish escaped the betrothed of Pauncefort.

His eyes fixed on his gentle leech, Edmund Fitzwalter submitted patiently to the torture she was obliged to give him, and when freed from the poisoned ligatures gave a deep sigh of relief, and sinking back on his pillow, lay apparently senseless.

'Think you he can recover, lady?' whispered Trafford,

'I have not leechcraft enough to say,' she answered; 'he appears much relieved by the fresh bandages. I fear me, though, that if the unguent be poisonous, it must, ere now, have mingled with the blood.'

'I would the friar were come,' said the squire; 'I bade John o' the Byres bring the most skilful leech he could find in Oxford. He should be here shortly.'

The lady's supposition was but too well founded. The momentary consciousness during which he had recognized her, passed away with the short interval of ease, and the knight again raved wildly and fiercely.

'Thou shalt never wed her,' he cried, addressing some imaginary being at the foot of his couch. 'I tell thee, never! Ay, ay,' with a low, chuckling laugh, 'lie there, beside the churl: *he* slew thee, not I! Hist! there is blood on my hand! hasten, Alinor, haste thee, good wench—it burns like liquid fire; wipe it off, I tell thee!—Will nothing quench this thirst? No, not the overflowing Nile! Give me to drink, villains, and put ice in the cup—my tongue burns!'

An attendant, at a sign from Constance, presented him with a cup of water. He tasted it, and then, with a wild yell, dashed it from him. 'Rascal!' he cried, furiously, 'I ask you for cold water—a poor boon—and you give me boiling blood to drink! Away, lest I tear you in my wrath!'

Constance, overpowered by terror and pity, leaned, pale and trembling, on the squire.

'This is no scene for you, gentle lady,' said the boy, mournfully, 'and you can in nothing further stead my poor lord : let me escort you to your own chamber ; I will inform you when the priest arrives.'

Constance bowed an assent, for she felt sick and faint with fear and horror, and taking the youth's arm, prepared to leave the room. Her movement instantly roused the unhappy knight.

'Stay, Alinor, stay, I beseech thee !' he cried. 'Give me of the snow that was thy winding-sheet, my humble bride, and I will bless thee.'

Trafford hurried the maiden from the room, and as they ascended the turret the ravings of the dying man became at last inaudible. When Constance gained her chamber she sank, nearly insensible, on a seat, and the cares of her attendant, who had followed her to the sick-room, and been a terrified spectator of the fearful scene, were earnestly, but for a time vainly, exerted for her restoration. A flood of tears at length relieved her. Trafford, who had stood gazing on her the while with pity and admiration, then approached, and kneeling on one knee, raised her hand to his lips.

'Angelic lady !' he said, 'from this moment I devote myself to your service, and whether my master, Sir Edmund Fitzwalter, recover or die in his sins, I will have no hand in your thralldom, but use my best endeavours to set you free.'

'Thanks, gentle Trafford,' replied the lady ; 'I will rely on thy kind promise. Now hasten back to that most unhappy and, I fear me, guilty knight, and send me, as thou mayest best, tidings of his state, which is right perilous. I will myself to prayer. The Virgin forbid that I should think of aught beside, whilst a fellow-being lies in the thrall of death and peril of eternal perdition.'

He withdrew, and the Lady Constance knelt in prayer.

Day dawned on the earth, and the dim cold light of a winter's morning streamed through the narrow loophole ere she rose from the attitude of supplication. She had heard the fleet footsteps of the mule that brought the leech for both soul and body, even while she pursued her devout supplications for the dying sinner. At length a rap at her chamber door roused her; she arose, and bade her attendant open it, and a friar of the Order of St. Francis, accompanied by Trafford, stood before her.

'*Benedicite*, my daughter,' he said, as Constance bent reverently before him. 'I am come at the request of this youth, to tell thee thou art free to go whither thou wouldst. The saints pardon us!' he added, observing that she wore the white robe of a novice; 'hast thou been torn even from the sanctuary by this recreant knight?'

'I was carried by force from the Abbey of Romsey, holy father,' replied Constance, 'but I am not yet a novice: the holy mother suffered me to wear this dress whilst I dwelt beneath her rule, because it was my intention to become one shortly. Is my most unhappy foe still living?'

'No, daughter,' said the friar, 'he is gone to his account—a fearful one, if man may judge his fellow-being; but we will cause masses to be said for his soul, and hope in Heaven's mercy.'

The lady bent her head in silent awe.

'And whither wouldst thou go, my daughter?' again demanded the priest; 'it were well for you to leave this evil place as soon as may be.'

'I would pray of Master Trafford to escort me as far as Leighton Manor,' answered Constance; 'I have reasons for wishing to make my religious profession in another nunnery.'

'To Leighton Manor!' exclaimed the father, 'to the home of the Paunceforts! Your name, I pray you, lady?'

'Constance de Lingard.'

The good priest gazed on her with surprise and pleasure.

'Noble lady,' he said, with enthusiasm, 'I will myself escort you to your home. I have often heard the name of the Lady Constance de Lingard from my beloved son and pupil, Sir Gerald Pauncefort. Trust me, I am thankful to Heaven that it is in my power to aid you. Thou wilt escort the lady, Richard Trafford?'

'Ay, reverend sir,' answered the squire, bending reverently, 'right willingly. And now I would crave your good counsel as to how I shall dispose of the drunken knave, Dickon, whose poisonous drugs have slain my lord; and likewise of a certain father of your Order, who—saving your presence—lies below, with more wine in his brain than he can well carry?'

The priest looked vexed.

'For the ruffian, he must be taken to our good city of Oxford, there to take his trial for either intentional murder, or for using unlawful and magical drugs, as the case may be. For our sinful brother, he also may be carried to the same town, and I will take care he shall do due penance for his intemperance.'

Trafford bowed, and left the chamber.

'Well, Master Richard,' asked William of Crosslands, who waited without, 'what are we to do with yonder drunken carrion?'

'The father says we must send Dickon to Oxford gaol, to take his trial.'

'An I am not one of the jury to sit on him, I am no true man,' interrupted William.

'And I! And I!' echoed several rough voices: 'our dead

lord was a good master, and a generous one to us, and we will starve rather than Dickon shall not swing for it.'

'Ay, ay, my masters,' responded another of these worthies; 'who so fit to be on the jury as we are, I should like to know, who have known the criminal so well, and are witnesses of the whole affair?'

'And for the shaven-pate?' inquired William of Crosslands.

'He is also to be carried to Oxford, to be tried by a jury of friars,' answered young Trafford, smiling.

'Marry, he will not be very hardly dealt with, if the good fathers have any fellow-feeling for each other,' laughed the yeoman: 'but let us go and see if they be awake yet.'

They proceeded to the apartment in which Richard had bolted them the night before, and found the bottle companions still snoring heavily.

'Arouse thee, Dickon,' shouted Trafford, as he kicked the sleeper in the side; 'the jail and the hangman are waiting for thee!'

'Thou liest, Master Squire,' said the ruffian, endeavouring to rise, and rubbing his inflamed eyes; 'thou wilt hang first thyself: my lord is my very good lord and master, and I tell thee he will let no man harm me.'

'Thou drunken fool!' cried the squire, 'it is for slaying' thy lord that thou shalt die—for anointing his wounds with that devil's balsam thou didst put on them, pretending it was of healing power.'

'How! what sayest thou, Richard Trafford?' asked the villain, sitting up, and apparently completely sobered by the frightful intelligence that greeted his awakening senses—'my master dead?'

'Ay, villain, and by thy means. Thy balsam was a burning poison.'



'Now, by all the saints, I knew not of it,' exclaimed the alarmed Dickon; 'I was told on our voyage home, by Master de Tracy, that it was a sovereign remedy for a wound. Marry, it would have been a fool's trick to kill my best friend.'

'A fool's and a villain's,' answered Trafford, coolly. 'Nathless, thou must to Oxford forthwith, to abide thy trial; so no more words!'

They then endeavoured to rouse the priest, but either he had taken deeper potations than his comrade or had a weaker head, and they found it impossible to awake him to his sober senses; all that he said and sung, when his eyes were open, being little beside the babblings of intoxication.

The ruffian Dickon preserved a sullen silence as he was conducted to the city. William of Crosslands, however, remarked, that as they descended Heddington Hill, the wretch (who was bound before him) shuddered.

When the party who had escorted the priest and his guilty companion to their several destinations, returned, the Lady Constance prepared for her departure, accompanied by the friar, and escorted by the young Trafford. It was a bright sunny morning, and the maiden breathed a fervent thanksgiving when she found herself beyond the hateful precincts of her prison. As they descended the winding pathway, she glanced back on the tower, and tears filled her eyes as she thought of the hours of misery the unhappy peasant girl must have endured within its walls. The good friar observed her emotion, and riding close beside her, on his sleek mule, endeavoured to soothe and cheer her by his pious and edifying discourse. They journeyed slowly, for the lady's strength was as yet unequal to much exertion, and it was with a similar sensation to that with which the shipwrecked mariner greets the friendly

shore, that she beheld the turrets of Leighton rising from amongst the trees. She found that her arrival was not only a surprise—as she had anticipated—to the Lady Pauncefort, but a relief to her intense anxiety, as that morning had brought a missive from the Abbess of Romsey, informing her of the singular disappearance of the intended novice. The good lady ascribed the act to the lawless forest rangers, regretting that the state of the county in which the abbey stood rendered such crimes common, and slightly blaming the imprudence of her charge, for venturing beyond the convent walls in opposition to the sage advice and entreaties of the sister who accompanied her!

The Lady Pauncefort listened to her daughter's true account of her abduction and imprisonment with mingled astonishment and horror, and, with many an embrace and blessing, declared that nothing should again induce her to resign Constance to a cloister.

In their after conversations on the singular events which had so rapidly followed each other, Constance told her adopted mother how strangely uncomfortable the nun's manner had always made her, and the suspicion she could not avoid entertaining, that Amicia had been accessory to the knight's plot. And her suspicions became convictions, when she learned that the nun was an aunt of Edmund Fitzwalter's.

'I knew her,' said Dame Edith, 'in my youth, which was spent, as you well know, in the Abbey of Romsey, and I ever deemed her worldly, subtle, and ambitious, though at that period she was a mere child in years. She was a sister of Edmund's mother: they were co-heiresses—the one, beautiful as the Madonna—the other, much as you now describe her. The Knight of Baynard's Castle was said, nevertheless, to be a suitor for her hand—perchance he really wooed her wealth—but her sister

Florise returned from a visit to an old relative, and the handsome Fitzwalter transferred his love to her—wooed and wedded her. Amicia was her sister's bridemaide, but shortly after endowed Romsey with her wealth, and became a novice of the Order which she has since professed. Doubtless she looks to be Abbess hereafter, and feared lest your wealth and interest might cross her views.'

'It may be so,' answered Constance: 'but she need not have feared me. I would not be an Abbess for worlds.'

'And wherefore a nun, my child?' asked the lady, gently. 'Oh! Constance, if you could have known how I have missed your light step, and sunny smile, and gay carol, you would not have left my age desolate!'

'Mother, dear mother,' said the maiden, 'if I erred, I have been justly punished. But I fear the return of Gerald—I fear that he may deem himself bound by our troth-pledge, and in a generous feeling of self-deception, persuade me to make his lot miserable! I feared for myself also, dear mother!'

'And am I not the guardian of your delicacy, and of your maidenly dignity? Trust me, my daughter, Gerald shall never call you wife, unless he can truly take the solemn vows of that sacrament. Abide with me, my child. If he love you not (and I am a shrewd judge of such matters), we will seek another dwelling, and wend our way to the close of life together. But I hope better things—men seldom wed their first love, let troubadours and *trouvours* say as they list, and my Constance would not surely scorn an affection based on that sure foundation, gratitude and esteem?'

Constance replied not, but a sweet undefined hope followed the lady's words. Perhaps her trial of a convent life, by convincing her that the walls of a cloister contain no waters of

Lethe, aided the entreaties of her maternal friend, and induced her to remain at Leighton.

The Dame Edith was profuse in acknowledgments and attentions to the friar who had accompanied her daughter home. She persuaded the young squire to await at Leighton the return of her son, promising him that the knight would receive him into his service. Richard Trafford was an orphan, and had lost his last friend in Fitzwalter, who, though unprincipled, was kind and liberal to his followers. He therefore gratefully accepted her proffer, only stipulating that he might first return to attend the funeral of his dead lord. The Franciscan departed with him to Oxford, and Leighton Manor resumed its ordinary repose.



### CHAPTER XLIII.

#### THE RETURN OF THE CRUSADERS.

Who would not change a raven for a dove?

SHAKSPEARE.

NOT until the following year did any tidings of the ransomed Pauncefort reach Leighton. A chance traveller, who had left Egypt about the same time, then brought tidings that the army of the Cross had departed from Acre, and that the knight and his followers had previously sailed for France. It was probable that he would soon arrive in England, and every rising sun was hailed by the anxious mother as that which might restore her son. Constance expected his return

with mingled hope and fear, though she would not allow herself to think it possible that she might yet be his wife. Her health was now completely restored; she was no longer a poor dependent, but a wealthy heiress; her exquisite loveliness had gained in expression, and was more touching than ever; and if her grace and usefulness were somewhat impaired by her great loss, she could not but remember that it must give her a new interest in the eyes of her ransomed lover.

We have described the departure of the Crusaders—we would fain sketch their return. It was the morning of a glorious June day when the party entered the village. Their number was fearfully diminished, and the remainder had lost the gallant appearance they wore, when, full of hope and religious enthusiasm, they had departed to fight for the Holy Sepulchre. Their ruddy English faces wore a darker hue, and an expression of gloom, for they well knew the sorrow that must fall on many a neighbour or kinsman who would seek *the dead* amongst their lessened band.

Young and old came forth to meet them. Here, a mother looking eagerly for her son, with beating heart and straining eyes, and meeting his nod and smile with a suppressed cry of rapture; there, a betrothed maiden leaning pale and trembling on her mother, because she sees not him whom she seeks; or a father, who, on the brief reply of one of the horsemen to his eager question, 'Thy son fell at Massoura,' turns away in speechless anguish, for he who thus perished was the sole child of his old age! But whether they sorrowed or rejoiced, all had a welcome for their young lord, who was more changed by his absence than any of his followers. His fair complexion was bronzed, his figure had a bolder and a more martial bearing, and his brow a look of resolve and command it had

never before worn. And not less changed was his character. The dreaming student had become the man of action, the wavering slave of his own sensibility and imagination now listened only to the dictates of a clear and already matured judgment. By his side rode a handsome young man, with whom he often conversed, pointing out to him as they passed onward the chief beauties of the landscape before them—the rich wooded champaign country, the silver Ousel gliding amidst the soft and verdant dales, and the small town near it, which already boasted of shining slated roofs, that glittered in the dancing sunlight.

‘My native place cannot boast of the wild beauties of the North, nor of the loveliness of the sweet groves of Cyprus, Wilfred,’ he said, ‘but it is a fair heritage still, and will ever offer a glad welcome to you and your wife.’

‘Thanks, Sir Gerald,’ said De Lucy, ‘for your hospitality: I would not wish to be in a fairer part of the country, though, if you dwelt in a desert, I should equally rejoice to visit my benefactor. Yonder is Leighton Manor, is it not?’

‘Ay, yonder is the old Hall! Did you ever see such beeches? they nearly hide the building. Let us give its inmates warning of our approach.’

He raised a horn to his lips, and blew it cheerily; then spurring his steed, dashed on at full speed, followed by his companion. The drawbridge was lowered, the hall doors opened, and the widowed lady embraced and welcomed her son. When their first greetings were over, and the guest presented, Sir Gerald asked eagerly for Constance.

‘She is in her own apartment,’ replied the lady; ‘go to her, my son, and thank her for your Ransom.’

The knight needed no second bidding. He hastened up the

winding stairs to the bower chamber, where in his boyhood he had passed many a happy hour, and in a few minutes was kneeling at his fair deliverer's feet, covering her hand—alas! her only hand—with tears and kisses.

'My sweet, generous Constance,' he exclaimed, 'my deliverer, how shall I ever express my gratitude and my sorrow? The devotion of my whole life can never repay your goodness.'

'It is amply repaid by your safe return,' she said, between smiles and tears. 'Gerald, I hope you received my letter?'

'Ay, dearest! But, Constance, you are in grievous error if you think I could resign you. No, most dear maiden, you have ransomed one who will consecrate his whole future life to you.'

Constance listened, with glad relief, to the frank confession of his past error which he then poured forth, and to his assurances of unwavering faith hereafter. Then she, in turn, related the visit of Edmund Fitzwalter in the disguise of a palmer, his first defeated attempt to carry her off, and his final success whilst she resided at Romsey Abbey; her discovery, while in the tower, of the poor Alinor's ribbon and bodkin; the outlaws' attempt to rescue her, and the terrible fate of Fitzwalter. At the mention of the poisoned unguent the knight started.

'All-just Providence!' he murmured, 'he died then by the means intended for——' He paused, and as the thought suggested itself that this most horrible fate had been destined for the unsuspecting Constance, he pressed her to his heart, with a fervent thanksgiving to Heaven.

'My love!' he said, as she looked up in his face with surprise, 'I cannot doubt that this felon knight was the murderer of our Edward. The ravings you have repeated confirm my former conviction, that Alinor's lover and my brother's murderer were the same person.'

The lady shuddered.

‘I fear it is too true,’ she murmured.

‘And the ruffian Dickon? He could explain all—what has become of him?’ asked Pauncefort.

‘He was hanged for his lord’s murder,’ answered the lady, ‘though to the last he declared it was not intentional; but, even if innocent of that crime, Friar John, with whom he left a confession, says he merited death for his many misdoings. The good father (who liberated me from Alinor’s former prison and brought me home to our dear mother) was with him to the last, and hath been twice at Leighton since to inquire if you were returned, as he hath something to communicate to you.’

‘I will visit him as soon as possible, and learn his secret, though I already divine it. Doubtless the recreant slew his friend, to leave my Constance free to become his wife.’

‘Our Lady be praised for my deliverance,’ said the maiden. ‘His last evil deed unwittingly benefited me: but for his bearing me from the abbey, I should now have been a cloistered nun.’

‘And lost to me for ever!’ exclaimed Gerald. ‘Evil has indeed been turned to good for us, my Constance. Your unselfish goodness meets its just reward; but I——’

She interrupted his self-reproaches, by proposing that they should join his mother, ‘Who must be longing to look on you again, Gerald,’ she said. ‘I must not keep you longer absent from her.’

Smiling and blushing, she gave the knight her hand, and he led her down to the hall, where Wilfred de Lucy was conversing with the Lady Pauncefort.

The squire had borne his bride safely to his northern home, where he had left her with his mother, while he sought knight-hood from the sword of the great Earl of Leicester. The tale



he had to tell, and the written intercession of William Longsword, obtained the boon which, as a crusader who had turned back from the holy enterprise, he could scarcely have hoped to obtain so soon; and directly his spurs were clasped on, he started for Egypt, to fulfil his pledge given to the Count d'Artois. On his road he chanced to encounter Sir Gerald Pauncefort on his homeward route; learned from him of the loss of the battle of Massoura and the death of the French prince, and was persuaded by Pauncefort to return with him, since the crusade was virtually over.

The happiness of the reunited family of Leighton may be imagined. They had much to tell and to hear on both sides, and Constance listened with warm interest and sympathy to De Lucy's romance, and to the story of the deliverance which her lover had brought to him; nor would she hear of the young knight's departure till after her own nuptials.

Gerald and Constance were wedded in the old church of Leighton (for it was one of the new and better customs of Henry's reign, to proffer the solemn vows of marriage in God's temple), and the happy idiot Perrot, who had near that very spot so wonderfully preserved the bride, decked the pillars and the portal with fragrant blossoms of the season; and after the bridal was over, hurried home to tell the old yeoman how fair the bride looked—how sweetly she had smiled on him—and how the bridegroom had thanked and praised him!

Shortly after his marriage, Sir Gerald visited London, and sought out the Franciscan. The monk, after welcoming him to England, told him that he had a fearful tale to reveal, confided to him by Fitzwalter's ruffianly follower.

'He sent for me,' continued the friar, 'asserted his innocence of intentionally injuring his master; but acknowledged that he

deserved death for having some time previously robbed and murdered a peasant in the woods near Oxford. The ruffian added, that after the crime he visited the cell of one of our learned brethren at Oxford, and, by means of a magic glass, had seen his master, Sir Edmund Fitzwalter, meet a knight, whom he recognized as Sir Edward Pauncefort, in the wood; that after holding some short parley together they parted, when Fitzwalter, stepping suddenly back, plunged his dagger to the hilt in the other's body. That he (Dickon) then hurried to the spot, and meeting his lord on the road, told him that he had witnessed the murder, and suggested that, to avoid suspicion, they should lay the corpse of *his* late victim beside that of the dead knight, and thus make it appear that the churl was slain redhanded from the murder of Sir Edward, by Fitzwalter himself.

'And the motive for my dear, unhappy Edward's murder?' asked Gerald, who listened to this tale with sickening horror.

'Sir Edmund's passion for the Lady Constance de Lingard.'

'I thought so! Reverend father, did the caitiff tell you aught of the scroll the peasant girl possessed?'

'Ay; it was written at Sir Edmund's command by a hedge priest, who had wedded him to the peasant maiden. Its purpose was to lure Sir Edward Pauncefort to the wood where he was slain. The scroll is still in my possession. It appears that Fitzwalter, fearing the damsel Alinor Perrot suspected his crime, meant to send her from England with Dickon, but on discovering his intention she fled from the ruffian, and you delivered her from his pursuit.'

'Poor girl!' said the knight; 'she lived not to tell her tale of suffering!'

'Nay, he was secure of her secresy, if she had; she evidently loved him too well to betray him.'

‘Without doubt, the Miller of Leighton learned this sad story from the hag who dwelt at Charliewood,’ said Sir Gerald. ‘Did the villain speak of any after meeting between the poor miller and his lord?’

‘No. He confessed that he had told the fearful secret to his grandam, who may be the woman you name, but to no living being besides; he named no other person connected with Leighton.’

‘It is wonderful that one so unscrupulous and subtle as Fitzwalter should have suffered a witness of his guilt to live.’

‘Probably he would not have spared his confidant and creature, had he not thought that he might again require his services.’

Pauncefort was deeply moved by the recollection of his ill-fated brother, which this relation of Fitzwalter’s crimes naturally awakened, and expressed his devout gratitude to Heaven that he had not allied himself by marriage with his brother’s murderer.

‘Truly, my son, we are grievously ignorant of that which is best for us,’ said the father. ‘Nay, so blind are we, walking in this valley of illusion—our world—that we frequently pray for temporal gifts, which, obtained, would be sources of misery. Thanks be to the Divine Providence which scatters half our prayers to the wind! Mysterious, indeed, are its workings. I, who have given my life to the study of that Divine Nature, which is as yet an unknown book to the greater part of mankind, am despised as an impostor, or dreaded and abhorred as a magician. I, who worship God in His works, as well as in His revealed character of all-wise and all-powerful, am slandered as a disciple of the powers of darkness, like my great master, Roger Bacon.’

He spoke with some bitterness.

‘Nay, father,’ replied the knight, ‘it is but the ignorant who think thus. By the better nurtured, Bacon’s mighty knowledge and your own are admired with even a reverential feeling—albeit, I doubt if any one can fully appreciate you.’

‘It is a trial to our feeble nature to be beyond the age in which we live, for it is natural to desire the love and sympathy of our kind, Gerald. Yet thanks be to Providence, we have the comfort of communing with the mighty dead, and the hope of a name hereafter. The iron-clad warriors of our land may scorn, and the untaught serf may fear the student, whose greatest efforts appear to them a busy madness; but Futurity will do us justice. When the time comes—and come it surely will—that the light of science shall dawn upon our land, the philosopher will acknowledge my teacher and myself as brothers, and the sympathy we now rarely receive from the few lights of our darkened Christendom, will be ours from an enlightened world.’

It was seldom that the Franciscan spoke of himself, but now his enthusiasm appeared to hurry him involuntarily beyond his usually quiet and serene deportment. He sank afterwards into silence; and Pauncefort shortly afterwards wished him farewell, and returned to Leighton Manor and his newly-wedded Constance.



## CHAPTER XLIV.

## REPENTANCE AND PEACE.

Her tears fell with the dews at even,  
 Her tears fell ere the dews were dried,  
 She could not look on the sweet heaven  
 Either at morn or eventide.

TENNYSON.

**A**BOUT two years after their embarkation for Palestine, Louis and his crusaders left the Holy Land, and the Baron Fitzwalter, with one or two English knights—all, in fact, who survived of his followers—sailed for England. His daughter was still unmarried, though her hand had been sought by many brave and noble warriors. The Baron brought missives from the King and Queen of France to their royal sister of England; and Henry, whose object it was at the time to win favour with his powerful nobles, invited the lordly crusader and his daughter to a banquet at the palace; where, stately and brilliantly beautiful as ever, the Lady Cicely, whose face and form time really appeared ‘to touch with finer grace,’ was again the reigning beauty of the hour. Yet, at times, a sad expression clouded her dazzling eyes, and she became absent and thoughtful. Many whispered that she was much changed since the death of her princely lover, the brave Count d’Artois; but, if it were indeed sorrow that at intervals shaded her fair brow, it was proudly borne; she neither asked nor received sympathy from mortal.

She had declined dancing, and remained standing near the Queen the greater part of the evening; but as the heat became oppressive, she seated herself, unseen, behind a partially-opened

door, to seek relief from the cool breeze. Two of the guests soon after approached the doorway, in earnest conversation; one was Sir Guy de Ville, who had returned with them; the other, a stranger to Cicely.

‘You had not yet heard of the death of Sir Edmund Fitzwalter?’ said the latter. ‘I marvel the Baron should not have been informed of his kinsman’s decease.’

‘We have been but a week in London,’ was the answer; ‘and though ill news travels apace, our arrival can as yet be scarcely known in the country. I grieve to hear it. Edmund Fitzwalter was a right gallant gentleman, though of the gravest, when I knew him. Men said he had been gay, even to wildness, in his earlier youth, but his mood was changed when we met at Cyprus. The manner of his death, I pray you?’

‘It was most horrible!’ answered the gentleman: ‘he was wounded by robbers, who had enticed him forth from his strong tower in Oxfordshire; his hurts were, however, slight, and he would probably have recovered, but a ruffian follower of his persuaded him to have the wounds dressed with a certain unguent made by a Saracen leech, which proved to be a poison of a most deadly nature. The knight’s tortures were more horrible than I can describe—he died mad.’

‘And the villanous serf, did he escape punishment?’

‘No, he was tried and hanged at Oxford, but persisted to the last that he had intended to cure, not to kill. He asserted that he had stolen the unguent from an esquire of Sir Gerald Pauncefort, and that it was—as he had heard the youth assert during their homeward voyage—of sovereign efficacy for the healing of wounds. Such an excuse could not, of course, win belief.’

A heavy noise, as of something falling, interrupted their fur-

ther discourse, and turning in some alarm, they beheld the Lady Cicely Fitzwalter lying insensible on the rushes. De Ville raised her from the ground, and hastily naming her to the gentleman, desired him to seek her father. The Baron came, and after many efforts to restore her senses, consciousness at length returned, but the only words she uttered were,

‘Take me home.’

For days the Lord Fitzwalter trembled for the life of his beautiful child. Fever raged in her veins, and she raved wildly, accusing herself as the murderer of her cousin. Terrible had been the sensations with which she had heard that her kinsman—the only being for whom she cared, except Pauncefort—had died by the hateful means she would have employed to destroy her innocent rival. The ravings of delirium did not fully express the anguish of her guilt and her remorse.

When she rose from her bed of suffering, it was with a broken spirit; and her ambitious sire, who looked to his Cicely as the means of still further extending the noble alliances of his house, was stunned by the announcement of her intention to resign the world, and devote herself to the cloister. His anger and his sorrow were alike vain. She persisted with a stern resolution in her purpose; and on the same day that Sir Gerald Pauncefort and his gentle wife saw their infant son admitted within the pale of the Christian Church, Cicely Fitzwalter entered the hallowed walls of Romsey Abbey. Her sudden vocation, her disappearance from the Court, of which she had been the chief ornament, excited much wonder, and—from those who were not her rivals—some brief regret, and then she was forgotten.

Time glided silently away, and nine years after the profession of the Sister Cicely, Amicia, the unpretending nun, of whom few

had ever thought as capable of such an office, became Abbess of Romsey, and then her true character—full of stern energy, lofty talent, and unbounded ambition—displayed itself. The religious house of which she was the head had formerly possessed the privilege of inflicting capital punishment on offenders taken within the liberties of the abbey; but the vixen sister of the Atheling had not left the mantle of her spirit, with her official robes, to many of her successors, and the ‘*potence*’ and its privileges fell into disuse. One of the first acts of the new Abbess was to petition the (then) all-powerful Parliament, headed by the great Earl of Leicester, to restore the dreadful right to her convent. It was granted; and as she stood—her small person dilating with the triumph of gratified ambition—holding in her thin, long fingers the desired and recovered charter, the door of her parlour opened, and a nun (who was seldom known to leave her cell, save at the stated hours of devotion) stood before her. Who could have recognized in that form, wasted by frequent fasts and long vigils, and bending under a sense of guilt, the once beautiful and graceful Cicely Fitzwalter? The surprise of the Abbess was great, but the sister was a kinswoman of her own, and she treated her with indulgence.

‘What wouldst thou with me, my daughter?’ she asked gently.

‘I thought,’ said the nun, in a hollow tone, ‘when I left the world for the cloister, that the sinful passions of earth were excluded from its hallowed walls.’

‘Nay, there you erred, daughter: man must ever retain the evil nature of Adam, till the mortal puts on immortality. Else, wherefore is it that in the cloister also we are obliged to mortify our sinful bodies by frequent fasts and penances?’



'I meant,' said the sister, somewhat impatiently, 'that I expected to see the passions of earth wrestled with, and if not subdued, at least not wilfully indulged.'

'Neither are they, sister; our convent hath great reputation for its sanctity.'

'And what graspest thou in thy fingers so eagerly? The right of shedding blood! In my lonely cell I heard of it—of thy fierce, unwomanly spirit—and it was whispered me to warn thee against it.'

'Visions, wild visions!' said the Abbess, angrily, 'or suggestions of the Evil One, who would move thee to show disrespect and presumption to thy spiritual mother. Go to, my daughter, heed them not. Fast and pray!'

'Nay, but thou shalt hear me,' said the nun. 'Thou holdest the instrument of thine own perdition. Cast it from thee. Let not future ages shudder to hear that woman desired so horrible a privilege.'

'Thou talkest of that thou understandest not. Such power is needful, that the holy mother of this most noble abbey may defend her children from the aggressions of sinful men. We dwell on the confines of the forest, the resort of fierce and lawless robbers, who have hitherto despised our peaceful rule and constantly trespassed on the liberties of our house. The power of punishing doth not necessarily imply the will to do so.'

'Did not He whom we serve defend us when no such right existed, Lady Abbess? Alas! put not thyself in the way of temptation; give not the fiend power over thee! The man whom I loved as a brother died by my means, because for a moment I listened to the Tempter! I can tell thee of the horrors of guilt—of pangs of remorse, that equal the punishment threatened hereafter!'

She clasped her hands wildly, and the Abbess, who feared her occasional paroxysms of frenzy, said gently,

‘Calm thee, my daughter, and seek, by prayer, peace for thy troubled spirit. Thou hast had absolution for thy thought of guilt. It is useless thus to torment thyself. Beware now of the sin of harsh judgment of others, especially of those who are thy superiors. Go to the chapel, and pray; I am busied with matters of great moment.’

The nun sighed deeply.

‘Thou hast been warned,’ she said, ‘my mission goes no further. I will to the altar, and intercede for thee and for myself.’

‘Poor wretch!’ said the Abbess Amicia, as Cicely Fitzwalter left the chamber, ‘her reason is deeply tainted with this frenzy of remorse. Disappointed love—the intent to murder! I marvel not that a weak though haughty spirit sank beneath it.’

And with a self-satisfied remembrance of her own superior strength of intellect and purpose, the Abbess of Romsey walked with a proud step from her parlour towards the cloisters.

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Jumping o'er times,  
Turning the accomplishment of many years  
Into an hour-glass,

we will revisit Leighton Manor at the close of the Barons' Wars. The brave and victorious soldier who had fought and conquered beside Prince Edward at Evesham, is just returned, and is laying aside his armour, that he may embrace and give a father's blessing to his youngest-born, a lovely infant, with soft blue eyes, and a smile even now like her mother's. And the babe knows him, and stretches her small beautiful arms

towards him, as the nurse holds her; whilst Constance—the happy and beloved Constance—pretends to chide the eldest boy, who would fain bury his bright curls beneath his father's helmet.

'And now we shall have peace,' said the lady—'blessed peace! too lightly prized before we knew its horrible reverse.'

'Ay, Constance,' replied her husband; 'Prince Edward's genius will rule our turbulent people better than his weak father has ever done. But the old King hath at least a forgiving nature, and few of the survivors of this fatal battle will fail of receiving mercy. His Grace hath, at my request, pardoned the brave outlaws who were once your very good friends—and truly the rogues deserved it, for they fought boldly in his quarrel; and Wilfred de Lucy hath been rewarded with a forfeited estate.'

'I rejoice to hear it. Some day, then, I may hope to behold the beautiful Eudocia?'

'Ay, very shortly, for his new property is in our neighbourhood. Did I tell you, lady, that Eudocia's father is now a monk of the order of San Marco, at Venice, and so celebrated for his sanctity, that his canonization after death is probable?'

'I am glad to hear it, Gerald, for I pitied the old man in spite of his obdurate and vindictive nature.'

'The knight who gave me the intelligence added, that Louis of France projects another crusade. What say you, Constance? shall I join him? Would you ransom me a second time?'

'Ay, if need were, dear Gerald! But you jest with me, I hope. Surely you will not again engage in the Holy Wars?'

'No,' said the knight, gravely; 'I intended to return to them when I left the army of the Cross in Egypt; but during my passage homewards through France, I saw so much of the evils attending the abandonment of one's native land, that I re-

nounced my intention ; nor will I again leave my loved England for foreign and fruitless warfare.'

As late as the sixteenth century, Silas Taylor found at the east of the south aisle of Cowarne Church (Cowarne Magna) a monument, on which were two effigies—one of a knight, dressed after the Norman manner, the other of his wife. The right hand of the lady rested on the knight's armour, 'as if for note;' the left arm was raised. It was a stump. The hand which had been severed from it lay on the edge of the monument, beside the knight's effigy. 'Men's evil manners live in brass—their virtues we write in water;' and on the silent stream of Time the name of Constance de Lingard—with that of many another self-sacrificing and devoted woman—would probably have glided to oblivion, but for the love which reared that ancient tomb, whose blackening marble preserved for centuries the tradition of the KNIGHT'S RANSOM.\*

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\* The remains of the monument, especially the 'couped' hand, were to be seen till about twenty years ago, when the whole monument was destroyed by lightning.

THE END.











